

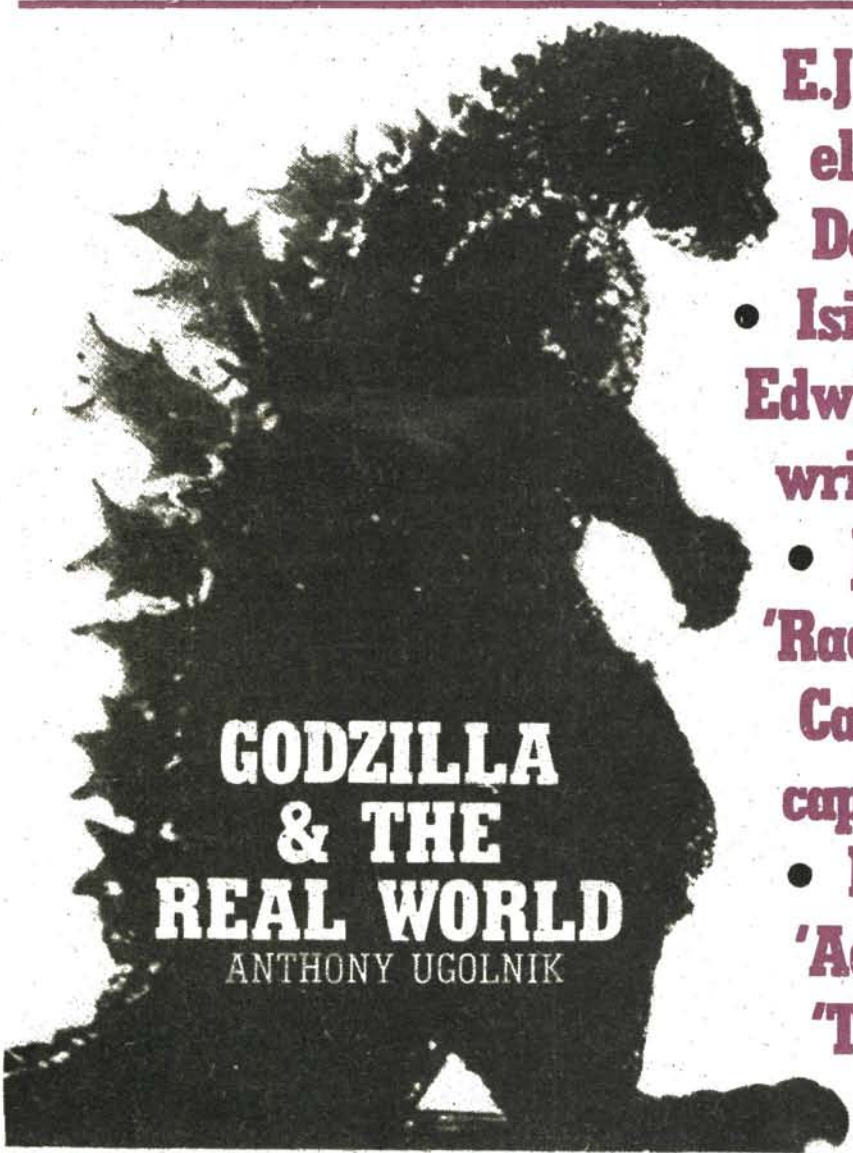
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The Editors
A DEEP FREEZE
CHURCH OF THE POOR

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NOVEMBER 19, 1982



GODZILLA & THE REAL WORLD

ANTHONY UGOLNIK

- E.J. Dionne, Jr., on the elections • Bernard Doering on Maritain
- Isidore Silver on libel
- Edwin J. Kenney, Jr. on writing about illness •
- John Garvey on 'Rachel Weeping' • Jim Castelli on preaching capitalism to churches
- Diana Culbertson on 'Accidental Grace' & 'The Way to St. Ives'
- Frank McConnell on Doonesbury

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Correspondence

In desperate need

To the Editors: Help! St. Benedict, St. Francis, and Mary Harris houses of hospitality in Washington, D.C. are in dire need. We know it's the nature of the Catholic Worker to be in chronic need, but we've exceeded even our normal quota of precariousness.

At this writing there are only four volunteers among the three houses, mounting expenses, and considerable debt. The thousands of homeless daily compete for our forty beds, seventy-five meals, and clothing, but our situation is so difficult that both Mary Harris and St. Francis houses are closed at this time and St. Benedict's is operating in the very deep red. Although it's tempting for us to take in our nets and call it a day, Michael Kirwan, Claire Schaeffer, Susan Burke, and I all agree that the needs of the poor are too great to abandon ship. The four years that Michael spent by himself running Mary Harris and St. Benedict's encourages us to "consider the lilies" and trust God that it can be done. We hope your readers will help.

We need your prayers most of all. Only through prayer have we lasted as long as we already have. We are also in desperate need of funds, material, and labor. In fact, just about anything you could send us, we probably need; including yourselves (volunteer opportunities abound down here).

Last week one of our neighbors spoke with me in hopes for a speedy reopening of Mary Harris house. "You give people a place to stay and something to eat," she said, "That's what it's all about. Isn't it?" Help us to be "about" this work again as soon as possible.

SCOTT C. DUFFY
ST. BENEDICT'S HOUSE
P.O. BOX 26209
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20001

Women & children last

Loveland, Ohio

To the Editors: In Archbishop Bernardin's article on "Poverty: America's Social Sin" [Sept. 24], I found a much

needed call for the American church to commit itself to the struggle for economic justice as well as to charity for the poor. The archbishop's points demonstrate the kind of clear thinking and principled stance I most hope for from church leaders.

In quoting statistics about the poverty picture from the National Advisory Commission on Economic Opportunity Final Report (NACEO, 1981), Bernardin made one oversight, however, which concerns me deeply. The report includes an entire chapter documenting the "feminization of poverty," a current phrase naming the trend that families headed by women and poor older women form a large and rapidly increasing proportion of the poverty population. The Archbishop failed to mention this trend.

From the NACEO report: "Two out of three poor adults are women. Moreover, families headed by women are experiencing a steady decline in their economic status. . . . Today more than half of the total number of poor families are maintained by women. Families with female heads have a poverty rate six times that of male-headed families (31.4 percent vs. 5.3 percent). When race is taken into account, the poverty rate also increases so that minority families supported by women have even higher rates. More than half of the families with female heads live in poverty, and 40 percent of all black children are poor. . . . The median income of single mothers was much lower than that of two-parent families. White mothers had a median income that was only 38 percent of the median income of two-parent white families; similarly, the income of Hispanic mothers was 38 percent of the average Hispanic family income; and the income of black mothers was 40 percent of black family income."

These appalling data demonstrate clearly that when we are talking about the poor in America in 1982, we are talking, in large measure, about women and children. When we are challenged as a church to make a "preferential option for the poor," we are, in fact, challenged to advocate justice for poverty-stricken mothers and their children, for destitute elderly women. Although the official

teaching of the church may deplore divorce and sanction certain norms of family life, families headed by women—divorced, separated, widowed, deserted, and single women—constitute the fastest growing portion of the poverty population. The call to serve the poor, then, requires that we serve these desperately poor families.

Further, Bernardin challenges the church to "undertake a fresh appraisal of poverty: its causes, its effects, and its solutions." When we find such a disproportionate number of women among the poor, we must suspect institutional sexism as one of the root causes of their poverty. Thus, our challenge requires that we analyze, confront, and eliminate that sexism wherever we encounter it.

MARIAN APRIL McCONEGHEY
Grailville

For economic justice

Washington, D.C.

To the Editors: Archbishop Bernardin's article [Sept. 24] is one of the finest calls to action written on the need to advocate for the poor. From dispelling myths about the poor, to laying out principles guiding social analysis and policy, the piece should be required reading for anyone who asks of the religious community's role in economic affairs.

One way to carry out this role is through a nationally organized effort. The Interreligious Emergency Campaign for Economic Justice was formed this year by Washington religious office
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WHY THE VOTERS WERE FREEZING

IT WAS THE BIGGEST referendum on a single issue in the nation's history. Nine states and the District of Columbia voted on the nuclear freeze resolution on November 2—with 275 city governments, twelve state legislatures, and 446 New England town meetings already on the record for it. Arizona alone turned it down.

Impressive. All the more so in that the administration mounted a strong counterattack against it. We welcome the questions, said Randall Forsberg, one of the freeze movement's most articulate proponents; the issues deserve public airing. Indeed, one of the more impressive achievements of the freeze campaign has been to take the nuclear issue out of the think tanks and into the public forum. As many more Americans now realize, a new generation of more accurate weapons, launched on fifteen- or twenty-minute computer warning, not only increases the menace of accidents, but the new technology has shifted the strategies of both superpowers away from deterrence to first-strike thinking—and plans for surviving a protracted nuclear exchange. When one adds to this flammable brew the deterioration of East-West relations over the last eight years, it becomes apparent that in all but name the U.S. and the Soviets face each other on a war-footing—one that resembles the pre-World War I situation all too closely for comfort.

Must our safety be built on the anxiety of the Russians? Does a highly volatile arms race represent, as the Reagan administration claims, a firm ground for negotiating with Moscow, or, as the freeze proponents claim, does it not provide quicksand? Is not Russian security, no less than our own, a special American concern, in fact a precondition for our own and world stability? These are some of the good questions raised by the freeze movement—and well directed to an administration that matches the Russians in putting military calculation ahead of political and diplomatic wit.

Sample: among the position papers the State Department regularly passes out to visiting journalists these days is one titled "Preserving Nuclear Peace in the 1980s," a speech delivered to the Naval War College last June 22 by Paul Wolwitz, Director of State's Policy Planning Staff. The paper demonizes the Russian bear as hovering hungrily over Western Europe, its paws foraging for violent revolution in every third world country about the globe. The portrait bears out George F. Kennan's thesis that the Reagan administration mistakes Moscow's concern for military security, its obsession with secrecy, and the quest for prestige and influence abroad, with something else entirely—a passion for formal control and world dominance, a program Kennan argues the Soviets pretty well gave up at the end of the 1940s. Cavalierly, Wolwitz dismisses spheres of influence, containment, and détente as failed models for East-West relations. Moscow does not respond to political accords; it understands only one thing, and that's the "fact" of crude power—primarily, we are to understand, "nuclear blackmail."

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But this means, again as Kennan argues in the November issue of *Atlantic*, that the East-West relationship has been militarized—and negotiations take on the aspect of delaying tactics. The “worst case” scenarios of the war-planners thus all but displace diplomatic strategy—and as Leonid I. Brezhnev’s October 26 speech to his military chiefs makes plain, the Russians are willing to react in kind.

Does this make you feel safe? With MIRVs on both sides ten minutes away from their targets, it shouldn’t.

Other than the normal “substructure of friction” deriving from our political, ideological, and cultural differences, says Kennan in that *Atlantic* article, the Russians have done nothing in the last eight years of progressively more belligerent East-West relations to warrant Washington’s hostile turn. We have a much graver view than Mr. Kennan of the possible significance of Moscow’s departure from past policy in invading Afghanistan. Nonetheless, we can agree with his conclusion, “The record of American policy toward the Soviet Union over the six and a half decades of the existence of that body politic gives the impression that it was not really the nature of any external problem that concerned us but rather something we were anxious to prove to ourselves, about ourselves.” Just what have we been trying to prove to ourselves, about ourselves? Kennan does not answer his own question.

Secretary Caspar W. Weinberger’s new “Defense Guidance,” which calls for the “decapitation” of the Soviet state, suggests that there’s something very primitive going on here—like a ritual act of sacrificial head-hunting. If you consult your anthropology books, it’s the war-game of Levi-Strauss’s binary opposition, a game played by aspiring heroes who fear being reduced, second-best, shadowed, impotent, and vulnerable to the great evil: death. One catches an adversary with claims to the same heroic status, scapegoats him with all one’s hatreds, and barter his life sacrificially for one’s own. At root, the thing is an expiatory rite.

Do an increasing number of American Christians and Jews, the foul incense of sacrificial victimage still in their memories, smell this in the latest upsurge of nuclear demonry? We wonder. At any rate, the votes for a freeze indicate a widespread conviction that our nuclear strategy has less and less to do with anything one might consider rational self-defense, and that the men in Washington—unprodded—are not going to do anything about it.

CHURCH OF THE POOR

Does being a “church of the poor” necessarily entail supporting the New Deal, the social programs of the sixties and seventies, the welfare state in any of its forms, and/or socialism? That question, raised by a letter in this issue’s “Correspondence” section, is a fair one; and one that more and more Catholics must be asking themselves as they read reports, not infrequently exaggerated, of statements by liberation theologians, church agencies, and even bishops, demanding reforms that would aggressively counteract poverty.

Our answer is “no.” Being a “church of the poor” does not

automatically mean endorsing greater government economic intervention, or the welfare state, or socialism. Or, for that matter, “democratic capitalism.” To claim otherwise is a form of fundamentalism, whether of the left or of the right.

That said, we must add that the weight of Catholic social teaching, developed over a long period of time and based on a distinctive attitude toward the social nature of humankind, favors an active governmental responsibility for economic justice. It would be disingenuous to deny that these moral principles, although usually articulated in very general terms, embody political and economic judgments. The only alternative is a social teaching so purely formal as to provide virtually no guide to concrete action. Nonetheless, the political and economic content of the church’s social tradition is a source of discomfort to convinced followers of Milton Friedman and George Gilder.

The church’s social teaching are not inscribed in the Nicene Creed nor infallibly pronounced. Catholics are free, after conscientious reflection, to dissent from them and even, as in the case of the new crop of Catholic “democratic capitalists,” to argue for revising these teachings in the direction of a stricter reliance on the marketplace. But as long as the church remains unpersuaded by their viewpoint, these Catholics cannot complain if its corporate statements exhibit a principled predisposition toward government intervention.

Such a predisposition, however, does not mean approval of every form of intervention. Our correspondent rightly offers a healthy reminder that lofty intentions are no compensation for unhappy consequences. And she adds: “Evidence that government intervention may exacerbate poverty is usually ignored by liberals, including Catholics.”

She may be right about that, too. Human weakness makes all of us reluctant to have our pet notions subjected to rigorous examination. But the specific examples she mentions do not add up to quite the strong case she thinks she has — either against liberals or against government intervention.

Take the question of welfare-dependency — the creation of a “welfare mentality” that erodes initiative and personal responsibility. There is scarcely an observer of our welfare system, radical, liberal, or conservative — or indeed a user of the system — who does not acknowledge and deplore this reality. Yet exactly what is the scope of this problem, and how does it compare to the positive assistance that AFDC otherwise provides? As our correspondent herself states, “Most of those on welfare . . . remain for relatively brief periods.” A recent Ford Foundation newsletter reported on the long-term study of American family income conducted by the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan:

From 20 to 25 percent of American families turned to welfare in at least one of the ten years between 1969 and 1978, but only about two percent were permanently and totally dependent on welfare. . . . The popular notion of a ‘culture of poverty’ perpetuated through second and third generations is not evident in panel data, which show a low incidence of intergenerational welfare dependency.

Is AFDC responsible for the explosion in pregnancies among unwed teenagers? "Not solely," concedes our correspondent, perhaps in recognition of just how complex the data on teenage pregnancies and births, both here, abroad, and over time, actually are. Yet in the next paragraph, out of all the factors that have contributed to the growth of an "underclass" — internal migration, changes in the labor market, racial barriers, educational failure, cultural disarray — it is AFDC and other aid programs picked out as the forces that "spawn" new generations of unproductive youth.

Does the minimum wage increase unemployment among low-income groups and minority youth? Most economists think it does, including some liberals, who have proposed alternatives. Others argue that without the minimum wage the working poor would lose more in wages than the unemployed poor would gain in jobs.

Have income-transfer programs caused the decline in productivity? Hardly any analyses of America's productivity decline single out income-transfer programs as a significant factor. Data from overseas show that even higher transfer programs are compatible with gains in productivity.

Liberals don't need to be convinced that these government programs exacerbate poverty in some respects, even as they relieve poverty in other respects. Liberals do need more convincing evidence that conservative and free-market alternatives wouldn't be worse. In short, we do not find any strong grounds here for the notion that critics of government economic intervention represent hard-nosed economic knowledge while clerical advocates of the poor represent ignorance and naiveté.

Indeed it may be the clerics who are the realists, politically if not economically, while their critics are the blindly naive. Not only is the price of economic recovery being disproportionately paid by the nation's poor, but they are being told in addition, "It's all for your own good." Is it too much to suspect that these developments have more to do with the inequalities of political power than the certitudes of economic theory? To voice concern about this likelihood is entirely justified for a "church of the poor."

AEI & the churches

PREACHING CAPITALISM FREE ENTERPRISE GETS RELIGION

"THE Sociology of Religion and the American Enterprise Institute."

That was the imposing title of a two-hour panel at a conference on "Religion and Power" held in Providence, Rhode Island, on October 24. The sponsors were three academic organizations with overlapping membership and pretty imposing titles of their own: the Society for the Scientific

Study of Religion, the Association for the Sociology of Religion, and the Religious Research Association.

The decision by conference planners to schedule a session on the theological ventures of the business-oriented Washington think tank was a significant recognition of the efforts AEI and other neoconservative and right-wing groups have been making to influence the discussion of religion and public policy in America.

At one level, the session was a disappointment. The panel organizer said he thought he had invited two critics and two more friendly experts to speak, but found himself with four critics. And Michael Novak, AEI's resident theologian, was ill and could not attend, as planned, to respond to the papers.

He sent as a substitute Michael Scully, editor of *This World*, a journal on religion and economics published by AEI and the New York-based Institute for Educational Affairs. Scully was amiable and responded to a few points raised in the papers; but (a) he doesn't work for AEI and (b) he couldn't answer questions about Novak's personal conversions. Scully was pretty much a pinch hitter more concerned with not getting beamed by a pitch meant for another batter than with scoring any runs.

But the four papers presented offered some important insight into the phenomenon of the new theology of capitalism—its meaning, goals, tactics, flaws, and future.

Marvin Dunn, a sociologist from Lewis and Clark College, focused on Novak's work, particularly *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism*. Novak, Dunn said, is trying to respond to the "crisis of legitimacy" in capitalist countries. His writings "represent an attempt to reconstruct a plausibility structure—an ideology which hopes to legitimate the dominant economic and political structures. Novak's concern is that religion is no longer providing this for corporate capitalism."

Joseph Fitzpatrick, S.J., a sociologist from Fordham University, tried to explain why AEI and groups like the Institute on Religion and Democracy have linked religion and economics. He offered a summary of the views of Will Herberg, who argued in *Protestant, Catholic, Jew*, that as immigrants become assimilated into American life, the third generation looks for a way to reestablish its identity. Religion fills that need, Fitzpatrick said: "Religion became not a source for prophetic witness, but the basis . . . for a specific identity as Americans." According to him, the AEI-IRD initiative is not so much a matter of the economic system as "an attempt to possess, to hold on to the whole meaning of my life, in which my religious and moral perspective and ideals have become interpenetrated with the whole experience of the American way of life."

Fitzpatrick also said "The conflict between the prophetic witness which feels morally obligated to call into question economic and political and military activities in the spirit of the gospels . . . and those who seek to defend what they perceive as the Christian way of life is basically a conflict of cultures."

Another Fordham sociologist, James Kelly, offered a description of the "unwritten psychological logic" used by neoconservatives in the field of religion. In analyzing the first

(Continued on page 616.)

National affairs

DEMOCRATIC VISTAS

THE MIRROR IMAGE OF 1980

THE MAIN ISSUE of the 1982 election was decided before a single ballot was counted. The question was: what did the American people think of President Reagan's economic policies. The most definitive answer was provided by Republican candidates themselves. While the Republican party was running a nationwide television advertising campaign urging voters to "Stay the Course," Republicans seemed to be veering as far off the course as possible.

In New York, members of the campaign staff of Lew Lehrman, the Republican candidate for governor, referred to their national party's slogan as "Stay the Curse." Most Republican office holders ran more as incumbents who had delivered for their districts than as political leaders who had brought the nation salvation through tax and budget cuts. Even Congressman John Le Boutillier, who believed that personal insults were the highest form of politics and became a hero of the political right, ran radio commercials telling voters how he had saved his Long Island district from some of David Stockman's budget cuts and how he had battled to save student loan programs.

Moderate-to-liberal Republicans such as Senators John Chafee of Rhode Island, Robert Stafford of Vermont, and Lowell Weicker of Connecticut all made their independence from the president a major campaign theme. "Nobody's man but yours," declared Weicker's billboards.

Perhaps because dissatisfaction with the president's program was so palpable, the results of the election were a bit of a disappointment to some Democrats. On the basis of a really remarkable 56 percent of the popular vote, the Democrats picked up twenty-six seats in the House, and won some important victories in the process. John Le Boutillier was one of the losers; Barney Frank, one of the nation's most able progressives, defeated Republican Margaret Heckler, who had run a particularly vicious campaign. Jesse Helms's slate of New Right candidates all went down to defeat in North Carolina; many freshmen Republicans elected on the Reagan tide in 1980 were driven from office by this year's Democratic tide. Add to this the Democrat's winning of seven more governorships and big gains in state legislatures.

Still, the Democrats failed to make major gains in the Senate, and lost some very talented candidates, including

Toby Moffett in Connecticut, Jim Guest in Vermont, Harriet Woods in Missouri, and Julie Michaelson in Rhode Island. And the trend at the end seemed to be with the Republicans in most states. That, perhaps, was inevitable. When the 10.1 percent national unemployment figure was announced on October 8, it looked in most places as if the Republican party were about to be obliterated. From there, the only place the G.O.P. could go was up.

For the Democrats, there were also disappointments in the governors' contests, the most notable being Tom Bradley's defeat in California. In New York, Mario Cuomo—one of the country's most outspoken defenders of assistance to the poor—triumphed, but by a much smaller margin than he had hoped for. His opponent, Lew Lehrman, made political capital out of Cuomo's opposition to the death penalty by relentlessly harping on voters' anger about crime.

But there was another piece of the Lehrman campaign that provides a broader clue to what happened in the 1982 elections. In addition to talking about crime, Lehrman also talked a great deal about the evils of unemployment. Lehrman proposed the old Republican cure—massive tax cuts—but at the same time went out of his way to differentiate his program from the president's. (Lehrman said he would also balance the budget and stabilize the dollar through the gold standard.) Five days before the election, Lehrman publicly disavowed the "Stay the Course" theme and said the president had an obligation to show how he would end the massive unemployment that had hit the country.

THAT, MORE THAN anything else, is why the voters went Democratic in 1982. Really, the message of these elections is virtually identical with the message of 1980: voters want some party—they don't really care which—to set the economy right. One of the many fortunate results of this year's elections is that they will put an end to all the loose talk that the 1980 election was a mandate for conservatism. It wasn't; it was a mandate against the results of Jimmy Carter's economic policies: high inflation, rising unemployment, unprecedented interest rates. In 1982, the voters were demanding an end to unemployment. And in doing so, they returned to the party that always promised an end to joblessness.

It was also striking that in 1982, Ronald Reagan, that ex-Democrat, helped make Democrats behave like Democrats. The party's national theme—"It's not fair. It's Republican."—marked the Democrats' return to their historic role as the party of the little person. (Remember the 1930's slogan "If you want to live like a Republican, vote Democratic"?) All over the country, Democrats assailed cuts in a variety of programs, notably those that benefited the middle class. In Massachusetts, Congressman Joseph Moakley's campaign proclaimed:

"When the Republicans tried to cut student loans, Joe Moakley gave them an education." So it was elsewhere. And cutting defense spending became more popular now than at any time since the immediate post-Vietnam period. Democrats and Republicans alike will be looking to take some money from the Pentagon to pare down the deficit, and to provide more money for other programs.

BUT WHAT programs? Here, there is something of a consensus developing among Democrats. They want the federal government to spend money on jobs programs, with an emphasis on "hard" investment in roads, bridges, and water systems. This is a good sign, a realization by the Democrats that if they want to defend the public sector, they have to make sure it does some of the things it does best; and also show that "capital investment" can be the province of the public as well as the private sector. They also want the government to spend more money on job training. Here again, there is a link between the party's welfare goals and the country's economic needs: job training is good for the needy, especially older workers in ailing industries, and the young unemployed. But it is also another form of investment. "Human capital" is a popular word these days among the neoliberal "Atari Democrats," but that doesn't make it a bad thing. It's unfortunate that it took the disasters of 1980 to bring the Democrats back to the fact that if they are not the party of work—of jobs—they are not likely to go anywhere. Jim Wright, the Democratic House Majority Leader, described the new consensus this way: "Government doesn't owe everybody a living, but it does owe everybody the opportunity to earn a living." That's not a bad slogan for 1984.

That leaves a lot of questions unanswered. What happens to all the social programs cut last year? In view of the Republicans' dominance in the Senate and the president's own wishes, it is unlikely that a lot of the cuts will be restored, especially in the programs for the very poorest. Social Security? Representative Jim Shannon of Massachusetts has been telling his fellow Democrats that any one of them who would cut social security benefits ought to have his or her head examined. Given how strong an issue Social Security was for the Democrats this year, any broad changes are unlikely. (And before Democrats cut Social Security, they should bear in mind what James K. Galbraith of the Joint Economic Committee has been arguing: that indexing Social Security benefits has been the single most successful anti-poverty program of recent years, the one place where poverty has gone down substantially is among the elderly.) The third year of the Reagan tax cut? Republicans will resist rescinding it; some Democrats want to take it all back. The latter seems an odd idea in the middle of a recession, especially since the third year of the reduction is the time when it begins to be of real benefit to low- and middle-income people. The

Democratic compromise is to cap it at \$700, which would take benefits away from everyone earning more than \$50,000.

What is clear from the 1982 elections is that "Stay the Course" lost and the Democrats won. It is less clear where that leaves Ronald Reagan or the Democratic party. The exit polls showed that Reagan is still relatively popular, and that a large share of the electorate still blames the Democrats for the economic mess. In a sense, the 1980 and 1982 elections taken together might be viewed as a vote of no confidence in both parties. In 1983, these two weakened institutions will have to learn to compromise, even as the Democrats try to shape a broader vision for 1984. The best laboratories for the new ideas may turn out to be the state governments, where the Democrats now have new responsibilities. Lee Webb of the Conference on Alternative State and Local Public Policies, a left-of-center think tank, has argued for some time that most of the best New-Deal ideas were tried out in the states from the turn of the century to the 1920s. A New Federalism—different from "The New Federalism"—may be in the offing.

FINALLY, three groups deserve special mention. The latest cliché in our politics is "the gender gap." It refers to the fact that women are now far more likely than men to vote Democratic. Feminine Democracy is the product of many factors: women are more peace-minded than men; better educated women who would usually vote Republican are instead voting feminist interests; elderly women vastly outnumber elderly men, and tend to be poorer and more worried about transfer programs such as Social Security. This new fact of life is one that only a few Republicans coped with effectively this year. It will be interesting to watch what the two parties do about it over the next two years.

Then there is labor. The unions delivered for a lot of Democrats this year. The trade-union voters tended to follow their leaders and returned home to the Democrats in large numbers. Lane Kirkland is not likely to let the Democrats forget this, or to forget it himself in 1984.

The black vote was, once again, critical for the Democrats. In some places, particularly in Chicago, it came out in larger-than-usual numbers, though Tom Bradley in California seemed to suffer from a surprisingly low black turnout. For blacks, as for less well-off whites, the issue in 1982 was jobs. It was a message that rang out from polling booths all over the country: full employment—black and white together. It has a nice ring.

E.J. DIONNE

(E.J. Dionne, Jr., writes regularly on politics for Commonweal.)

(Continued from page 613) issue of *This World*, Kelly said neoconservatives "know it is at least plausible to deflect religious economic thought back to an earlier explicit preference for capitalism. They can hope to reattach some deeply human significance to capitalism by linking its survival to religiously important values like freedom of conscience, religious toleration, and democratic values.

"By this tactic capitalism is ennobled by the claim that its principles alone can protect the few shreds of religious meaning remaining in a demystified world. In these terms . . . the alternative to capitalism is not merely economic stagnation but unknown and fearful forms of religious absolutism and political tyranny actively inhospitable to the Judaeo-Christian tradition."

Kelly speculated that neoconservatives hope "to inoculate North American theologians and religious leaders to criticism from Latin American theologians who are so adept at finding connections between their countries' underdevelopment and our economic and military power."

And, he said, "Maybe they want to cut off in advance any temptations against American civil religion and lessen any possible impact the bishops' statement about the morality of possessing nuclear armaments might have on some laity."

Dunn and Rodney Sawatzky both criticized Novak and AEI for their treatment of systems and social forces. Sawatzky, from a theological viewpoint, charged that while Novak uses Reinhold Niebuhr's concept of sin, he ignores his concept of "systemic evil."

Dunn, from a sociological viewpoint, charged Novak with ignoring "social structures, classes, and history" and lacking "a sociological imagination." This results, Dunn said, "in reducing structural factors to individual problems. . . . The structure of corporate decision-making is reduced to the level of autocratic individuals and Latin American poverty is reduced to people having the wrong set of values."

Kelly ended his talk with a prediction and an explanation. "I predict that *This World's* criticism of religious economics will not call up from any of the laity much ideological debate about the degree of socialism to be found in church teaching. I don't think church teaching will change much either.

"While neoconservative thought has originated from Washington and Manhattan, Catholics and their churches have been located in places like Youngstown, Ohio, or Newark, New Jersey. . . . The real ideology of the churches is their localism. They're located in places where real people live, and it makes the churches and even their national leaders necessarily less enthusiastic than neoconservatives about the long-run efficiency of market disciplines."

Pointing to the 10.1 percent unemployment rate and other signs of economic distress, Kelly said, "It is sociologically unlikely that an increasingly educated populace would accept these conditions as somehow inevitably ordered by the natural law of economics."

JIM CASTELLI

(Jim Castelli writes a syndicated column on religion and public affairs and is Washington correspondent for Our Sunday Visitor.)

The courts & the press

LIBEL REVIVAL

THE DANGER OF 'MEDIA HUNTING'

THE RECENT JURY LIBEL AWARD of \$2.08 million to Mobil Oil Company's president against the *Washington Post* exemplifies the (newly coined) adage that "What the Supreme Court Giveth, the Supreme Court Can Whittleth Away." One might have assumed that, following the landmark 1964 decision in *New York Times v. Sullivan*, libel suits—at least by public officials or public figures—would have become an exotic rarity; but, as a spate of heavy awards against Time Inc., *Penthouse*, and some local newspapers demonstrates, this venerable form of legal action is alive, well, and even flourishing. Indeed, the revival has apparently engendered a change in the media's heretofore general policy of refusing to settle suits brought by public officials. CBS, clearly aware of the trend, recently settled two such claims by agreeing to pay somewhere between \$350,000 and \$500,000 to two Gary, Indiana, police officers and Philadelphia Mayor William J. Green.

It is obviously time to inquire into the nature of the beast, one with more than nine lives historically, to ascertain whether the Supreme Court, since *Sullivan*, whittleth away too much. I think that it has and, in the one realm of suits against the smaller media, would propose that the allegedly "tough" *Sullivan* standards be made even more formidable against the plaintiff. While, presumably, the truly mass media can take care of themselves in libel litigation, present standards of legal liability can only insure that local newspapers and small magazines (let us say, of less than 150,000 circulation) will be faced, as some have been, with ruinous costs whenever they become the least bit venturesome, costs which they will have to bear even if they prevail in court.

The basic problem is that, since *Sullivan*, the Supreme Court has jumbled the law of libel so badly that this area of law has returned to its customary state, one which, as the leading scholar in the field once said, "makes no sense. It contains anomalies and absurdities for which no legal writer ever has had a kind word." As at least some of the recent major libel cases clearly demonstrate, "innocent defendants" are often faced with "as rigid and extreme" liability "as anything found in the law" while, on occasion, there remains "a blind and almost perverse refusal to compensate the plaintiff for real and very serious harm." Since the latter statement refers mainly to the law of *slander* (oral defamation), I shall not further advert to it now. Nor shall I discuss the tangled, though fascinating, history of the development of the law in this area, save to note that much of its traditional confusion lies in the fact that judges

have harbored an aristocratic distaste for press "excesses" and have not acted so much to vindicate aggrieved plaintiffs as to put an allegedly licentious press in its place.

In full recognition of this, the *Sullivan* decision basically and simply held that libel suits by public officials against their critics could only succeed if the plaintiff proved that the allegedly defamatory statement was made with "knowing" or "reckless" falsity. Later cases extended the requirement to "public figures" (whoever they are). *Sullivan* was a practical decision, engendered by the scarcely unknown fact that Southern juries were awarding large judgments (*Sullivan* got \$500,000) to public officials against media critics of their civil rights policies and actions. The *Sullivan* rule was designed not to enunciate an immutable principle of moral law but simply to permit greater leeway (not the greatest conceivable leeway, incidentally) to political criticism or other commentary of great social importance. The Court well appreciated that "whatever is added to the field of libel is subtracted from the right of free speech." For a time, libel suits by the prominent were discouraged, and those that were brought were dismissed at early stages before costs could rapidly mount.

The Burger Court has "whittled" away at *Sullivan* in at least two respects, one involving the letter of the decision and the other its spirit. The Court has simply refused to find that many people one might think of as public figures were such, and it has encouraged *trials* (rather than dismissals) of libel actions even in cases where it was fairly clear that the plaintiffs could not win. It has also "honored" *Sullivan's* great loophole—the ability of a jury to find "reckless" falsity even where there is no *calculated* intent to harm by falsehood. Like a posse swarming through a mountain pass after a fugitive, the *Washington Post* jury rode through and found such recklessness in a story about a public figure which was, without much question, honest though not in all respects true.

While, as I have said, the mass media can take care of itself—through appeals, insurance (with fairly high premiums), and the like—it is the small crusading (or merely inquisitive) media which suffer most from the presence of two

infirmities, a narrow definition of "public figure" and the recklessness loophole. Often, it will be a local newspaper or magazine of small circulation which claims that "X"—an unknown or little known citizen—is a local powerholder who has misused that power. When "X" sues, he will not, under prevailing standards, be deemed to be a public figure and any mistake at all in the exposé will subject his critic to substantial damages. If he is a public figure, juries will often find recklessness where there is, at most, simple negligence, and this will occur even where the judge has carefully instructed them about the difference between the two standards. Even if "X" loses, he usually can afford his costs, while the winner may incur debilitating expenses for which (in America, though not in England), it cannot obtain recompense. If the term "chilling effect on the press" has any meaning, it will be precisely at this juncture.

Thus, it would seem that an immediately needed reform of present libel "principles" (and I use the term most advisedly) would be to modify *Sullivan* in appropriate cases to eliminate "recklessness" as a standard of legal liability. After all, in general, the law of defamation should punish the calculating and malicious libeler who seeks *only* to hurt another through falsehood. Perhaps, as an added protection, all of defendant's costs and expenses, legal and otherwise, should be chargeable to the losing plaintiff, at least where the defendant is economically vulnerable. *Sullivan*, it should be noted, did say that the identity of the parties should make a difference in result — certain types of plaintiffs suing certain types of defendants should have higher burdens than other parties. These reforms — which would have to be legislated by either Congress or the states, given the Supreme Court's present proclivities — will be necessary to truly realize the spirit of *Sullivan* and to insure that "media hunting" by the powerful not become, once again, both a national sport and a national disgrace.

ISIDORE SILVER

(Isidore Silver is a professor of constitutional law and history at John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York City.)

Of several minds: *Abigail McCarthy*

AGAIN, THE WOMAN'S VOTE

SHOWDOWN AT GENDER GAP

ARE WOMEN on the verge of gaining political power? Before Ambassador Jeane J. Kirkpatrick was so much in the public eye Basic Books published her study entitled *Political Woman*. In that year, 1974, she

could write with no gainsaying. "Even today, the most important and interesting question about women's political role is why that role is so insignificant. . . . Women are numerous enough at the lowest level of politics — in the precincts, at

the party picnics, getting out the vote, doing the telephoning, collecting the dollars — but remarkably scarce at the upper levels where decisions are made that affect the life of the community, state, nation."

She pointed out that in that year no women held the highest political or appointive offices and that "few of them have even attempted to enter the decision-making bodies of government either to articulate the special interests of their sex or to participate in making policy for the community." And this fifty years after the vote was won by women! There were, she said, four hypothetical

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constraints — four explanations — commonly given for that state of affairs: 1) physiological constraints, 2) cultural constraints, 3) role constraints, 4) and male conspiracy. In relation to the last she noted that women have never been excluded from breadwinning roles but only from occupations of profit and status, and that “men do not bar women from taking part in politics, but only hamper their efforts to participate in power.”

Now, not quite ten years later, women are seeking power in unprecedented numbers. Fifty-three women ran for seats in the House of Representatives this fall, three were running for the Senate, and over 1500 were running for positions in state legislatures. Not only is that so, but the difference in women’s political stance vis-à-vis that of men has become a source of concern to politicians. This difference showed up significantly in the national election in 1980 for the first time. President Reagan received fewer votes from women than he did from men and the same difference seemed to be showing up this year in House and Senate races. Pollsters call it the gender gap.

It was Mrs. Kirkpatrick’s conclusion that for women to achieve *de facto* political equality, to enter political life in the same numbers as men — “both a cultural and social revolution is required.”

Is that revolution on its way?

Certainly there have been changes. Women are still at the bottom of the economic ladder, still paid less than men for the same work, *but* — and it is an important *but* — the occupations of profit and status are now open to them. They are in law schools, medical schools, and schools of business administration in significant numbers. Each graduating class numbers as many women as men in its top third. That fact marks the easing of the physiological role, and cultural constraints — all of which have been under steady attack by the women’s movement — but it also proves that the most important changes for women come now, as they have in the past, through access to education.

Access to education, especially to that in the professional schools, was the result in part of cultural change but it was only

made readily available to women by law and the laws were made as the result of political pressure. It has seldom been noted but it can be argued that one reason for the failure of women to achieve power in politics is the strange failure of women leaders to move into the electoral process via party politics.

There are, of course, historical reasons. Women, excluded from the beginning from the electoral process, made their gains and exerted their influence through what could be called movement politics. The abolition movement, the temperance movement, the social reform movement of pre-World War I days — these were their schools. They culminated at last in the suffrage movement. The techniques of these movements were not the techniques of single-issue politics, of persuasion through public rallies and numbers, of public relations and demonstration. All these movements were highly moral in tone and seldom appealed to enlightened self-interest. The arguments, even for suffrage, were not based so much on the rights of women as on how the public interest and the level of culture and morality would be served by the unselfish contribution of women admitted to the public sector.

After women gained the vote they found it difficult to move into the reality of party politics. Party politics was suspect. Party politics seemed too pragmatic. Even such citizen education groups as the League of Women Voters, in eschewing any identification of its officers with party, in effect made party politics seem beyond the pale. For the leaders of the new wave of feminism party politics was



also suspect but for somewhat different reasons. They, too, were the products of movements — the civil rights and the peace movement. Their bent also was for single-issue movement politics and its techniques. In addition, they saw party politics as the instrument of man, the enemy who conspired to deny them power.

Had the ERA movement concentrated its effort and money on electing friendly representatives — men or women — to office in only a few legislatures ERA would be in the Constitution today. Instead an incredible amount of energy went into lobbying by exhortation, demonstrations, and public relations efforts.

At the same time that women were misdirecting their energy, however, they were learning. They were learning how to support other women and how to form networks. The numbers of women with practical political experience on school boards, town councils, in county commissions, legislatures and the Congress were increasing. (And they were women on their own — not women who succeeded fathers and brothers.) Women were learning also how to raise and use money for political purposes. “Frankly, I know of no better way of getting politicians’ attention than by building a massive campaign war chest and unleashing hundreds of dollars in critical state races,” wrote the president of one feminist organization to her membership.

The result is that candidates this year sought not only for the voting support of women but for their financial support. Women candidates for the first time were getting substantial campaign contributions from individual women and their organizations.

But the best part is that even as women are learning how to get power, and how to use it for their own special interests, they are also still using it for the benefit of the community, the state, the nation. As pollster Pat Caddell puts it, they stake out the first positions, whether it’s on quality of life or nuclear power, and it is the men who seem to be moving toward them. It is a pattern “of enormous political significance.”

ABIGAIL MCCARTHY



OUR POPULAR ART BETRAYED US

Godzilla & the real world

ANTHONY UGOLNIK

ARMS CONTROL EXPERTS tell us about the "real world" of arms control—a world inhabited by Mirvs, Marvs, and guided by MADness—mutually assured destruction. I don't know much about the real world. I don't think I believe in it, actually. Since I accept the principle that language itself is ideologically generated, each of us projects a worldview whenever we address a question. As a religious believer, a teacher, a political man, I believe in ideological subterfuge on three counts. So let's put aside the real world for a moment. I want to talk about Godzilla, among other things.

Yes, I said Godzilla—that fire-breathing monster who perennially arises from the sea to invade Japan, usually on Saturday morning television. You haven't thought much about Godzilla, I'm sure. Yet Godzilla is a figure, an archetype—a myth of the nuclear age. Myths organize our experience, but by definition we usually don't examine them. Ten years after Hiroshima, in 1955, a nuclear blast takes place near a lonely atoll in the Pacific—do you remember the movie? And Godzilla arises from the deep to invade Japan, under the directorship of Ishiro Honda and Terry Morse, and to wreak thrilling destruction until our own Raymond Burr, taking a leave from *Perry Mason*, is able to contain him. Raymond Burr contains Godzilla, he does not destroy him. In that first film, in 1955, Godzilla inspired terror and employs tens of thousands in mob scenes before he retreats back to the sea. Godzilla arises from the depths of our own strained imaginations, terrorized by the prospect of the Bomb. The monster in tromping over factories, crunching houses, tossing subway cars amid screams, *enacts* our greatest fears and purges us of them. In short, he embodies myth.

Lots of monsters were awakened from the deep by nuclear tests in movies of the fifties—giant ants, giant spiders in the

deserts of New Mexico, monster-men buried beneath the ice of the Arctic. Soon-to-be television actors like Raymond Burr and Peter Graves save us from the destruction that they wreak. White males save us from the terrors of the Bomb, even in Tokyo—accompanied always by that figure known in the trade as the Blonde Screamer. You who watch such films will know whom I mean. The woman, often a scientist—expert in entymology or radiation—deals rationally with the threat. "I'm sorry, Mr. Trueheart," she says with petulant contempt as she examines a massive slice of ant thorax, "but this cannot be an insect of any known species." The brawny male, who usually totes a handgun and eventually commands whole brigades of the U.S. Army with flamethrowers at his command, takes charge by saving said female scientist, now screaming lustily with the top buttons of her lab coat open, from a charging Praying Mantis. The army rushes to the rescue. *Finis*. The End. The film often fades out with a pious platitude uttered in a deep voice about "Man's inability to fathom the mysteries of the world around us." But the real message is otherwise, God, guns, and guts—but mostly white male guns and guts—will save us, the Blonde Screamers, from the monster unleashed by the mushroom cloud.

DON'T UNDERESTIMATE the power of such paradigms. All the details of nuclear arms race notwithstanding, these value-bearing artifacts of our culture teach us how to *feel* about nukes. We need experts to explain to us the means of our own potential destruction, the Mirvs and Marvs. We need only sit back with a box of anxiously crunched popcorn to watch the drama of our fears played out for us.

Godzilla, after all, made a bundle for his makers. And he was reborn, many times. And in the rebirths something interesting happened. Godzilla, once the embodiment of our terrors, comes back. He still crunches down houses and all that—he's still a destructive son of a gun—but he now protects us from *more* destruction. Rodan. King Kong. Monsters unleashed from other alien sources. Godzilla becomes our savior. With the advent of MAD—mutually assured destruction and the nuclear deterrent—the monster becomes our ally.

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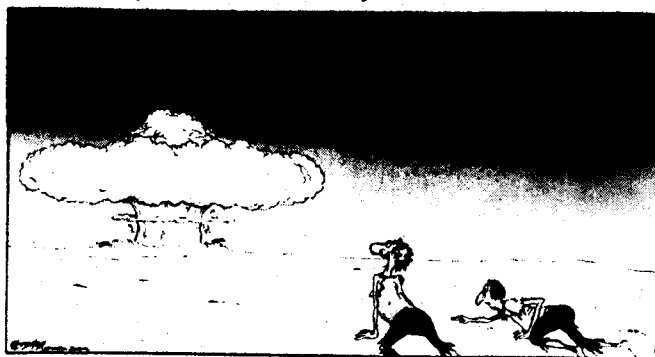
Raymond Burr has now retired. New Japanese heroes have Godzilla as their ally in the quest to save the Japanese versions of the Screamer (no longer Blonde). Godzilla smiles as he breathes fire. After crunching through a village or two, he even manages to save a child from the tanklike threat of Rodan.

This, you see, is the "real world" we learn about from the arms control experts. Nuclear deterrence. Godzilla meets Rodan. The monster becomes less terrible if he faces another monster. The cities of Japan crumble, of course, as the monsters battle each other to the death. But Godzilla, *our* monster, wins. My children watch a cartoon version of Godzilla now on Saturday morning television. The next version is a breakfast cereal. We have achieved a kind of catharsis of terror embodied in a Tyrannosaurus Rex.

GODZILLA is simply a paradigm. Other films deal with the threat in less archetypal ways. In 1957, based on Nevil Shute's novel of the same name, Gregory Peck and Ava Gardner await death in Australia in *On the Beach*. There is no hope in that film, which focuses on characters in an untouched Australia awaiting death by nuclear fallout. Death, incidentally, was noble. But few myths end with universal destruction. *On the Beach* demands a kind of pessimistic resignation, a Nordic doom-of-the-gods determination to fight with the assurance of defeat.

Panic in the Year Zero, directed by and starring Ray Milland and featuring Frankie Avalon (but not Annette Funicello), is more typical of the nuke genre. *Panic in the Year Zero* features American Everyman, complete with station wagon, caught outside L.A. after a nuclear war. He and his family survive through a learning process. He learns to fend for himself in the mountains. He learns to protect his family against marauding gangs of bike freaks. (Incidentally, in many of the novels and films people on motorcycles are impervious to nuclear attack, especially if they ride in packs.) He learns to use a gun and become confident at it. In short, he learns to become Davey Crockett—and in doing so we leave him a wiser man, purified somehow. Nuclear war has reaffirmed the American man in the wilderness and, amidst regrettable destruction, has eliminated many of the pressing urban problems of our society. Motorcycles and guns, in their phallic simplicity, survive the maelstrom intact. This is the mythos, reaffirmed again and again.

The next year, in 1963, Stanley Kubrick directed the mas-



"Look—civilization!"

terful, dark satire *Dr. Strangelove*. And, as satire is wont to do, it exposed the underlying myth and gave testimony to its power. Slim Pickens straddling the bomb in rodeo style comments on the "real world." We laugh because we recognize the truth of the image. Franklin Schaffner in his gentler satire, *Planet of the Apes*, makes a comment no less clear in 1968. The apes reflect us, and in the Darwinian reversal we perceive our own misconceptions of ourselves.

FILMS EMBODY the mythos, but novels constitute its sacred text. A vast genre of after-the-bomb novels, many of them massive best-sellers, fill out the way in which we organize this imagined experience. For it's not true, as you see, that nuclear war is unthinkable. It has been thought many times—sometimes in surprisingly subtle and expert form. And we can look into these worlds after the bomb to see our own hidden imaginings.

In 1949, on the very threshold of the Cold War, Carl Sandburg recommended a book by George R. Stewart as a best book of the past ten years. The book, *Earth Abides*, has fallen out of print but it was a powerful document in its decade. In 1947 Stewart images most of America depopulated by a deadly virus. A hero, Isherwood Williams, with of course a woman by his side, founds a small settlement and we see modern man rediscover the way of life appropriate to our continent—the way of the American Indian, re-asserting itself amid the rusting hulks of our technological age. The virus is symbolically born of the Bomb in an era which yet didn't know what the full effects of the Bomb would be. The interesting thing about the novel is its treatment of the things which endure—the landscape, which is the novel's recurrent theme, is beautiful, yet indifferent to man if not hostile to him. The world has been purged of the blight of man's technology. Our ruination turns the world into a kind of National Park. The men who survive do so with respectful obeisance to Nature—as hunters and gatherers. Men go and come, but, as the title suggests, *Earth Abides*.

Ten years later, this theme of purification endures in different form in a second popular novel. *Alas Babylon*, now in well over thirty-seven printings, has over one million copies in print. Pat Frank places the scene of survival in Central Florida; but the terms have changed. The hero's brother is a Colonel in the Strategic Air Command. Ultimately, not only the brother, but the whole military structure of the U.S.A. survives intact. Abandoned for a time by military order, however, the brother must take on the task of survival in his small town. A la Ray Milland, he learns to tote a gun again and protect his supplies against the inevitable marauders and motorcyclists. His natural sensitivity becomes reserved for the insiders, the townspeople who worship in the white-frame church and embody a way of life. The theme of the novel is not a natural, but a social purification—note the biblical overtones of the title. Small arms and sidearms, rifles and ammunition, keep a way of life intact. The *structure* endures. What disappears is the threat. The U.S.A. wins a thinly populated world—but we have it to ourselves.



After *Alas Babylon* the theme of social survival repeats itself with regularity. In Robert Merle's best-selling 1977 novel, *Malevil*, a small community of Frenchmen survives in a medieval French castle after a nuclear holocaust. In this Continental novel, interestingly enough, it is not American individualism, a kind of National Rifle Association self-sufficiency, that prevails, but a medieval communalism and an established hierarchy that survives and pulls us as a species through. But again, the nuclear holocaust leaves us a strangely purified world—one in which the survivors deal with the world on terms that harken back to another age, an age cleansed of the very technology that brought us to the crisis. There are no ambiguities here. The American cowboy gives way to the French medieval lord—but man survives.

THE BURDEN OF ART and the burden of language itself is precisely that. Humankind must survive. And yet when we look at the literature born of our greatest fears, we sense a profound betrayal. If we accept the thesis that the artist bears some responsibility to his society, and I do *especially* when the subject is man's very survival, we have been lulled into a false dream.

Humankind will *not* survive in a purified world—a cowboy or a Marlboro man or a French lord in his castle. Our survival will alter the conditions of our existence. Only the novel—*A Canticle for Liebowitz* by Walter Miller, which makes virtually every neglected classics list—is true to that realization.

In *A Canticle* we see mankind in an order of monks dedicated to the preservation of knowledge we have misused. They survive a Holocaust and relive once more a new middle ages, a new Renaissance, and ultimately a new modern age in which we destroy ourselves yet again. There is nothing purifying about survival in this novel. We bear in the mutations that afflict our flesh the scars of our survival. Our very souls, our imaginations become seared by the massive trauma of this ordeal by fire. This is the best novel of the genre, and the only

one that teaches us that survival would be a fate, not a destiny.

It is good to look at our imaginations. Like our minds, they are capable of sin. And our diseased imagination projects for us a world devastated of all life but ourselves, all fulfillment but our own. It bears fruit, this diseased imagination. The Survivalist movement, with its magazines and mail-order catalogues, its legions and summer camps, act out the fantasies of the sickened, beguiled soul.

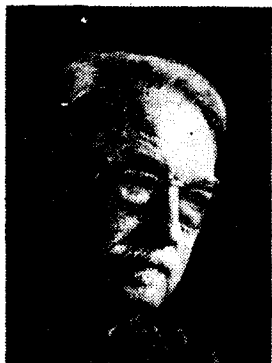
"We don't worry about society," says the survivalist in a recent interview, surrounded by her boxes of supplies and cradling her rifle. "We take care of number one. Good old American values will pull us through."

The fact is that masses of people in this country have prepared themselves to survive. Horribly, grotesquely, they actually look forward, some of them, to the "unthinkable." They think it and embrace it. Most of us may be inclined to support the Catholic bishop in Amarillo who counsels his flock to leave the nuclear arms industry. But the United Way threatened to blacklist Catholic charities. The Moral Majority minister of a Northwest congregation finances billboards which urge us to arm ourselves against the Satanic men—our Rodan, King Kong, our armies of the dead, *the Russians*.

Much of our popular art, then, has betrayed us. It dares to make meaningful that which has no meaning. Nuclear holocaust is the antithesis of creation—a moral black hole. It undoes the very work of God. And we need a new sign, a new symbol born in our age to bring that home to us. There is an urgency in the task. The Holocaust, Hiroshima, the Bomb in all its grisly epiphanies—these experiences confront us, but they do not unite us. Of course we oppose nuclear devastation. But we don't really believe in it.

Art fails us. Perhaps something more elemental—ritual, ceremony—can succeed. Some theologians have proposed Hiroshima as a place of pilgrimage. During the Vietnam years, those who served as medics used to wish that the American people could be marched, one by one, down the antiseptic halls of the Burn Ward at Fort Sam Houston. Americans should have seen what the napalm they so glibly mentioned could actually do. Those Bavarians marched through the Nazi death camps after the war; maybe they should lead a procession. We should perhaps all see Hiroshima, and accompany the pilgrimage with the smell of burnt flesh. Those Bavarians learned something, to be sure. They encountered the outcome of their own myths. In the "real" world, our diseased imaginations affect our behavior. Myths are more important than they are made to seem.

Perhaps, before any "realistic" discussion of the arms race, those who cherish realism could simply enact a small ritual concession to the real. Many so-called primitive rites of initiation, after all, enact rituals to prepare novices for significant events. They should take a match. Gently, without hesitation, they should light the match and hold it to the tip of a little finger. Keep it there without flinching. Watch the skin curl. Smell the nail burn. In the pain, in the excruciating focus of pain, may be held the key to peace in our times. There we truly discover what is real.



Jacques Maritain: to a young girl

BERNARD DOERING

DURING THE CENTENARY year of Jacques Maritain's birth (he was born on Nov. 18, 1882) much has been said and written about the career of this illustrious Catholic philosopher. Since his death in 1973 the research done in Maritain's papers has brought to light an aspect of this great personality which few of his admirers realized. He was one of the great letter-writers of his century.

Two collections of his letters have already been published. The first is his correspondence with Emmanuel Mounier, the famous Personalist philosopher and activist who founded *Esprit*. It was published in 1973, the year of Maritain's death (*Maritain/Mounier, 1929-1939*, ed. Jacques Petit, Paris, 1973). The second is his correspondence with the novelist Julien Green, member of the Académie Française. This deeply moving exchange of letters appeared under the title *Une grande amitié* (Plon) in 1979. A new edition is presently in the press because a considerable number of letters between Green and Maritain have been discovered recently and fill many lacunae in the first edition. Maritain's voluminous correspondence with Yves Simon, a French philosopher who had been a pupil of Maritain and taught for many years at the University of Notre Dame and at the University of Chicago, is presently being prepared for publication.

There are many others with whom Maritain carried on an extensive correspondence which will without a doubt appear in print before long. But there is also an enormous number of letters to and from individuals with whom he exchanged a few or even only one letter. Some of these individuals are famous; others unknown. The sheer volume of these letters is overwhelming and it is difficult to understand how a man who published over eighty books and countless articles, contributed to anthologies, prepared his classes with meticulous care, and was sought after from every direction for conferences and lectures, had time for so many letters. Still he made time to reply with gracious concern to all those who wrote him, however humble or unknown they were. He seemed incapable of letting any letter that contained an intelligent inquiry or a

sincere cry for help go unanswered, even in the years when his health was failing and he let it be known publicly that he had given up all letter-writing.

There is no better example of this conscientious sense of responsibility to those who wrote him than the copy of his beautiful letter to an unidentified young girl recently found in his papers. The letter was published in the *Cahiers Jacques Maritain* (No. 2, Apr. 1981) in the hope that the person to whom it is addressed might see it and identify herself.

After the death of Raïssa, Maritain spent his last twelve years among the Little Brothers of Jesus at Toulouse, except for the summers he regularly passed with the Grunelius family in Kolbsheim where his books and papers were stored. They were years devoted to study and to that contemplation which he had longed for ardently, which, in the rare moments he could find, he had shared with Raïssa before she died and of which he spoke so eloquently in the last chapter of *Le Paysan de la Garonne*. But the serenity of these last years was not easily maintained. There were, of course, the difficult months of the controversy over *Le Paysan* and the publicity that followed, as well as the publicity connected with the two literary prizes he received. There was no end to the importunities of the curious, the interview-seekers, or those who simply wanted to add another name to the list of celebrities they had met. The Little Brothers protected him as much as they could. The letterhead at the top of the stationery they printed for him and which he used with all but his closest friends read:

I am an old hermit come to the end of his life, but who still has work to do. To my great regret I am forced to give up all correspondence.

However, this printed note would often be followed by a long and very personal handwritten letter.

In addition, his health was failing rapidly. He was under the continual care of doctors, who tried to limit his activities. When he adamantly insisted on going to Kolbsheim each summer (all his books and notes were there and, perhaps even more important, all the mementos of Raïssa: her furniture, her paintings, her books, the little things she used, etc.), they demanded that he lessen the fatigue of the journey by limiting his business in Paris; later, by not stopping there at all; and in the last years by making the trip stretched out on a mattress in the rear of a station wagon.

In spite of his fatigue and the immense amount of work he

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set himself, he never failed to find the time and the strength for anyone who wrote to him or who came to him with a sincere question, a call for help, a need for affection. He was an accomplished listener who radiated welcome, sympathy, and understanding, inspiring in his correspondents or his listeners the sense that, however humble their situation, they deserved, because of what they were, his complete attention and concern. For example, in 1964, just before he left for Kolbsheim, he wrote to Julien Green.

"I cannot write you any more than this. For two months now my health has been declining at an alarming rate, and I know now what it is to feel fatigue *usque ad mortem*. In spite of it all I intend to leave soon for Kolbsheim (by automobile on a mattress) and pass through Paris. Alas, my doctor will permit only a very short passage and I have some indispensable business to transact . . . I would so much like to see you, both you and Anne, even if for only a few minutes. Will I be able to? I'm not sure of anything. In any case I will try to get the Little Brother (Brother Joel) who is driving to telephone you." (*Une grande amitié*)

NOT LONG after he arrived exhausted at Kolbsheim, he received from a young unknown girl a letter filled with despair and a cry for help. In spite of the fatigue of his journey, he replied immediately. A copy of this letter was found recently in his correspondence.

July 29, 1964

"You are seventeen and I am going on eighty-two; it seems to caught up with me in Alsace (where I am spending my summer vacation). I am answering you at once, for I would be distressed if any undue delay should make you think that I am guilty of the least indifference.

You are seventeen and I am going on eighty-two; it seems to me we should be able to understand one another. Let me tell you two things right off. 1. I think you are really a poet at heart (that is evident from the very start because of a certain tone). 2. I do not think you have lost God. You would not feel so furious with Him if He did not appear to you as someone who has betrayed you, and who makes you indignant because you love Him. Yes, you are 'in quest of Beauty, of the absolute, of a God who is not one of hate.' And how right you are! Your revolt is healthy because it is a revolt against a God who is not the true God.

"The Christianity you were taught was a child's religion. At



seventeen your eyes have begun to open on the world as it really is. You are asked to realize that Christianity is a terrible mystery of love, and that the Cross is not a pleasant and comfortable figure of speech protecting those joys over which popular preachers wax so eloquent, but actually a gallows of horror on which God was hanged for love of us—because all the abomination of this world comes not from Him, but from man's freedom which is the *prime cause* of evil. And God restores all things—invisibly by His love, and the love of His saints who lay down their lives for their friends. Perhaps what I am writing you here seems to make no sense, but I am writing it all the same because it is the truth, and someday you will see that it is.

"I am not telling you to wait. I am telling you rather to take advantage of the fact that you are completely broken and beaten to the ground in order to set yourself to a real search for truth—putting your childhood behind you.

"That means you have to put your intelligence to work. To do that, it is good to start by reading a few books. First of all (since you felt inclined to write me), Raïssa's *We Have Been Friends Together* (before asking to be baptized, we too had rebelled against God). And then Léon Bloy (the selections which Raïssa had published by *Mercure de France*, and *The Woman Who Was Poor* as well as the volumes of his *Journal*). You will undoubtedly find Bloy's language too rich and somewhat labored (but what difference does that make; it's what he says that counts).

"And since, if I am not mistaken, next year will be your year of philosophy, you could at that time, if you are not afraid of tackling difficult problems, read a little book I published recently, *God and the Problem of Evil*, and I would be most happy to send it to you.

"Cocteau came to see us because he felt, with his poetic intuition, that the very evil that shocks and scandalizes us makes us cry out to the innocence of God and that if we have to suffer the intolerable and the inadmissible, it is because on the other side of the tapestry, hidden from our view, there is a love infinitely more true than all the misery through which we must drag ourselves.

"All those chapels that he decorated in honor of the Blessed Virgin, how could your unfortunate *directrice* understand what they meant? He never lost his faith. I have the greatest hope for him (as I have for Reverdy). Bloy said to me one day: 'In hell there are no sinners because sinners are the friends of Jesus. There are only the malicious.' In Jean there was never even a shadow of malice.

"I am not telling you to wait—but I am telling you to pray as best you can, blaspheming perhaps, groping and stammering. Tell Him, 'If you exist, make yourself known to me.' And ask Jean Cocteau too, and his friends in heaven to help you.

"Your letter moved me deeply, and I had to overcome great fatigue to write you. If my letter is awkward or clumsy in any way, please forgive me. With all my heart I want to do something for you. On this poor earth I am praying for you. And in the Light of God Raïssa too is praying for you.

"JACQUES MARITAIN"

Media

ZONKER'S SUNSET STRIP CLAIMS OF ENDANGERED INNOCENCE

ZONKER HARRIS is in danger of graduating from college, Joan Caucus-Redfern is about to have a baby in her middle age—thereby suspending her promising career as a Congressional legal advisor—and even Uncle Duke, manic apostle of irresponsible journalism and “recreational drugs,” shows distressing signs of slipping into something like rationality.

Gasp! (Heavy sigh.) It is a sad, sobering time for those of us who have followed and delighted in *Doonesbury* since its inception in the late sixties. Gary Trudeau has announced that he will suspend the comic strip in January of 1983, for perhaps as long as two years. The purpose of the suspension—among other things, one presumes—is to give Trudeau a chance to rethink his characters, and to re-imagine their roles and relationships for the world of the eighties.

So far, so good: one was beginning to wonder if those preternaturally-archetypal students (hippie Zonker, armchair liberal Mike Doonesbury, football/Republican B.D., radical disc jockey Mark Slackmeyer) would *ever* leave college, or if they were doomed, like Little Orphan Annie and Dagwood's son Alexander, to a four-panel-a-day timewarp, getting never older and a little less relevant with each repetition of their pre-ordained gestures.

That they are not so doomed is an indication of how seriously Trudeau takes the strip: as seriously, I would think, as an exceptionally good novelist takes his fiction, and rightly so. For *Doonesbury*, taken altogether and taken at its astonishingly frequent best, has grown into as good a “novel” as any I know of in the last twelve years. But to say that is also to say how much *Doonesbury* will be missed—and how very good it was.

Norman Mailer once observed that some of the best prose in America was written on bathroom walls. Certainly graffiti include some of the most urgent, acid, and immediate satire most of us have seen. And Mailer's remark helps us see how much a really good comic strip has in common with the art of graffiti. Both are arts of the moment (even the most provident cartoonist works with only a three-week or so lead time). Both are arts midway between the “public” and the intensely personal. And both, in their very disreputability, can manage a power, a pure moral anger, beyond the reach of more official forms. The medium may be the message; but it is also, for the harried cartoonist or the desperate scribbler on the john wall, the weapon.

In this respect, at least, Trudeau has written what is simply some of the most unforgettable prose of his decade. Let me

give on example, an example that dates itself. In four identically-drawn frames, Zonker and Mike stare across a peaceful countryside. Zonker speaks: (frame 1) “They say it's very pretty in Ohio this time of year.” (2) “They say it was very pretty a year ago today, at Kent State.” (3) *Silence*. (4) “Have a nice day, John Mitchell.”

The writer's purpose is to reconcile the ethical and the aesthetic (or so says Kierkegaard), and if that single strip doesn't do it, then I don't know what does. In fact, the silence of the third frame—where you and I pause for our own reflections on the unspeakable—is an act of pacing and wit that deserves the name of genius.

And that is why *Doonesbury* matters, because it reminds us again that no art, nothing made by man, is incapable of beauty and moral force in the hands of a serious enough artist. Previous strips, like Al Capp's *Li'l Abner* and Walt Kelly's wonderful *Pogo*, often managed the same sort of bitter comedy—and, indeed, Capp and Kelly were both better draftsmen than Trudeau. But Trudeau's sometimes clumsy drawing is the perfect complement to his unerring ear for the phony, the manic, and sometimes the lyrically gorgeous in the American dialect. His twenty or so major characters are much more voices than they are faces—walking, and brilliant, graffiti, as it were.

The first massive paperback anthology of the strip was called *The Doonesbury Chronicles* (the next two, *Doonesbury's Greatest Hits* and *The People's Doonesbury*). And the term “Chronicles” was well chosen. For looking back over all three collections, we can see that they are indeed one of the most efficient histories of those years. There again is the paranoid comic-opera of Watergate (caught in Trudeau's drawing of a White House progressively obscured by an ugly brick wall); there again is the absurd wedding of politics and showbiz which was Elizabeth Taylor's brief career as a Washington hostess (“A tad overweight, but with violet eyes you could die for—it's on their bumper stickers”); Jerry Brown's California/cynical attempt to turn jargon into presidential rhetoric (“Governor, if we turned the cameras off would you still exist?”); and a great deal more. They *are* chronicles, in the best sense of the word: not documentary photos, but a connected series of psychic snapshots, showing us again the world we lived through *as it was perceived* (which is always more important than *as it was*) by at least one decent and humane man.

Maurice Horn, in his indispensable *World Encyclopedia of Comics*, faults *Doonesbury* and Trudeau for lacking an ideal-



ogy, for attacking the absurdities of left and right with equal vigor, assuming that irony is a valid substitute for commitment. But Horn has a French idea of what "commitment" means—i.e., uncompromising and arrogantly abstract righteousness—and such an idea simply does not apply to the more spacious, and perhaps more livable, tradition of American (or Anglo-American) satire.

Like Mark Twain, Gary Trudeau is willing and eager to recognize and name fools when and wherever they appear. And like Twain, he is willing to let his fools reveal their foolishness through their own language. Far from being a "lack of commitment," this can be taken as a very strong commitment to something that goes beyond ideology—to the decency of speech itself.

If there is a theme that runs through all the best and most memorable of the *Doonesbury* strips, it is this very simple one: people who lie to themselves tend to make themselves look silly by maintaining their lies. Simple, as I say: and also, if world and national politics, the N.F.L., television, and fully sixty percent of normal discourse is any indication, nearly impossible to remember.

It is, indeed, a kind of reincarnation of the world of *Huckleberry Finn*—that most persistent of American mythologies—a world where innocence, though endangered, still has claims to recognize, if not absolutely triumph over, the surrounding bog of hypocrisy. It is the vision of a New Deal—or, more properly for Trudeau's generation, New Frontier—idealism.

So perhaps it is appropriate that the ongoing world of *Doonesbury* should suspend operations during the Reagan Years. The strip has been getting a little tired, the situations have been becoming a little stereotyped, over the last few months. And *Doonesbury* has already spawned a number of imitators, "intellectual" or college-humor strips of varying degrees of merit, from the whimsical *Bloom County* to the unrelievedly dumb *Funky Winkerbean*. Trudeau, in other words, has left his mark on the American comic strip, whether he chooses to return or not.

And *Doonesbury* was the product, as well as the barometer, of its age. Drawn by a former Yale undergraduate throughout the seventies, it was the eloquent expression of an imagination caught between the horror of the Vietnam war and the memory of the hopes of the early Kennedy years. It was a "novel" about growing older and sadder during a time when the national imagination seemed to be fighting against sclerosis of the conscience, and struggling to remember what it was like to be proud. And maybe it makes sense that the cartoon hero of the present should not be the dazed but still confident hippie Zonker, but another kind of character altogether: Garfield, cynical, voracious, self-indulgent—the perfect fat cat.

Be that as it may, the suspension of *Doonesbury* leaves breakfast—and the national stock of sane writing—much the poorer. Good luck at graduation, Zonker. Hurry back.

FRANK McCONNELL

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Stage

TRIUMPH OF THE WORD

BETTI ON BROADWAY

THERE ARE directors — a noble breed — who put their imaginations to the service of the play they are staging, use their skills to illuminate, to enrich the playwright's work. There are directors with so strong a sense of their own aesthetic personalities that they impose themselves on any dramatist who crosses their path. There are directors who distrust the plays they deal with, who hope to make difficult work palatable by scrambling for conventional theatricality. Waris Hussein may wish to be numbered among the first group, but his handling of *The Queen and the Rebels* places him firmly in the third. Primarily a television director, with years of service at the BBC, where classics are regularly reshaped to fit the medium (and which, thirty years ago, commissioned Henry Reed's translation of *Queen*), Hussein seems to have asked himself how he could make Ugo Betti acceptable to American audiences and come up with solutions that almost — but not quite — finish Betti off in the process.

Although *Corruption in the Palace of Justice* had a respectable run off-Broadway in 1963, Ugo Betti has never found a place on the American stage. Even the more theatrical Pirandello, the Italian playwright with whom Betti is most often compared, has found the going difficult in the United States. Betti is very much in the European tradition of philosophical drama. The central dramatic action of his most ambitious plays usually involves a protagonist's pained recognition of his or her identity and an acceptance or an embracing of the actions that are a consequence of that self-discovery. Yet, the character's interior struggle takes place in a sea of talk in which the

"If you have a friend whose intellect you deeply respect, this is the gift."
— *The Boston Globe*

"Caustically funny... a marvelously provocative, opinionated, coruscating book."

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Prejudices

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other figures are being forced into new conclusions about themselves and in which the protagonist's journey can be seen in the shifting pattern of ideational assertions (or disguises). American audiences are not supposed to bear up under long speeches, although they seem able to listen to characters talk at length if they rather than someone on stage is being addressed (v., the success of *Amadeus*), and are supposed to prefer action to words. Since Betti's anguished discussions usually take place in implicitly melodramatic surroundings, the plays may seem to promise action that is never delivered, but the words are the action and the power of the plays lies in what all those words finally reveal.

The Queen and the Rebels is very much in that Betti style. A group of travelers have been stopped near the border of an unnamed country where the revolutionary leaders hope to discover the fleeing queen, who is dangerous as a symbol rather than a person. In a long night of conversation, accusation, interrogation, Argia, a whore with a taste for play-acting, assumes the role of queen and finally, recognizing that her choice frees her from the impositions of others, dies as the queen she pretends to be. The other characters — the commissar who is Argia's chief antagonist, the real queen, Argia's selfish lover, the dying general, even minor figures like the porter and the engineer — are victims of oppression, within and outside themselves, and they serve as unhappy contrasts to the Argia who finally finds her way to an oddly fulfilling death.

One of Betti's recurrent themes, here and in other plays like *The Burnt Flower-Bed*, is that revolution, however real the indignities that bring it on, is simply a substitution of one authority for another. It makes a useful background for the protagonist's discovery of her own culpability in her demeaning life. It is and it should be off stage, reflected only in the talk. Hussein has decided that there is a real revolution afoot in *The Queen and the Rebels* and, noticing that Betti's script calls for peasants, soldiers, and other supernumeraries who perform technical services (open doors, etc.) or act simply as decoration, he brings the rebellion before our eyes and ears, fills the theater with the noise of gunfire and a helicopter and the stage with soldiers whose unnecessary business distracts from the real action of the scene. A single unfortunate example. In the first act, Argia has an important speech about the humiliation of women by men which she delivers to the peasant woman (the real queen) while applying cold cream. It is a scene that establishes the connection between Argia and the queen and emphasizes the quality of mind in Argia that lets her move from self-awareness at this simple level to her final act of self-assertion. Hussein provides her with a larger audience, two other women who mime outrageously and obscure both the speech and the queen's reaction to it, and then he sends in a soldier, breaking the rhythm and the meaning of the speech, to take the intruding women off stage so that Argia and the queen can play their first encounter as Betti wrote it. Hussein's invention here — unfortunately typical — is so foolish, so obtuse, so destructive that it is a wonder that Betti survives at all.

That he does is a compliment to Colleen Dewhurst's playing of Argia. She holds on to the developing line of this speech as she does to the whole character and works her way past Hussein's intruders to show us that the many faces of Argia belong to one woman. She is helped by Betty Miller's queen when they are allowed to play a scene without interruption and to a lesser extent by Peter Michael Goetz's Commissar Amos. In some ways the most difficult character in the play, Amos is a rational voice atop a cauldron of anger and envy, and Goetz never quite finds the man partly because he is robbed of a key speech about the humiliations he has suffered and because he is saddled with unlikely melodramatic touches as though he were the very model of a villainous stage interrogator.

Argia's final speeches in the play, when the words and the speaker have come together at last, are a kind of triumph and I have always thought they should be played that way. I would still like to see them done as I have imagined them, but Colleen Dewhurst's powerful reading shows us again that a good play can embody alternate truths. She reads those last speeches as though she were still, painfully, working her way to the final exit, with the fear of death entwined with her courage, and only at the very end is her victory clear to her and us. Argia, Dewhurst, Ugo Betti go out with head high.

GERALD WEALES

Screen

L'AVVENTURA II AN UNADVENTUROUS ANTONIONI

MOST ARTISTS spend their entire careers in the elaboration of a single theme or idea. Once in a century, perhaps, there is a genius like Picasso capable of re-inventing himself again and again. Rarer still is the artist like Marcel Duchamp, who could admit to himself that moments of true originality come but once in a lifetime. After the brilliant early success of "Nude Descending a Staircase," Duchamp quit painting. He didn't want to repeat himself just for money and fame. He spent much of the rest of his life playing chess. We can't ordinarily expect that kind of self-honesty and self-discipline, even from geniuses. Nonetheless, it is always a bit sad to see an artist decline into superficial repetitions of earlier triumphs — into being one of his own imitators, a mere echo of his former self.

Ardent readers of this column will be surprised to see me having such regrets about the most recent work of Michelangelo Antonioni, a filmmaker whom I was praising just last year for his ability to remain daring, inventive, original. The work he showed then at the New York Film Festival, *The Mystery of Oberwald*, was a use of video as imaginative in its way as his use of film had been twenty years earlier in *L'Avventura*. I felt once more in *Oberwald* the heat of experimentation. Antonioni was again searching out the possibilities

of a medium, risking failure, and sometimes achieving it, in order to remain innovative. The film he sent to the Festival this year may be more successful, but at the cost of also being safer, less adventurous, less original.

Identification of a Woman is very much a re-make of *L'Avventura*. Like Antonioni's 1960 classic, the new movie was written in collaboration with Tonino Guerra and is about the disappearance of a woman. Again, a man searching for the woman finds instead another one who replaces the first in his life. In the earlier film, there is a moment when the man actually mistakes the second woman for the first, and in the new film something similar happens. Daniela Silverio and Christine Boisson, the actresses who play the two roles in *Identification*, even look alike. This reinforces our sense of the physical continuity, and symbolic parallel, between them.

Here, as in *L'Avventura*, Antonioni plays out in his story and its settings the parallel between the women. In *L'Avventura*, the barren island on which the disappearance of the first woman occurs has its own counterpart, its *doppelgänger*, in a deserted town to which the man comes later with the second woman. In *Identification*, the man, a film director named Niccolo (Tomas Milian), also finds himself in different settings that resemble each other as eerily as the two different women he brings to them. At one point when he is driving the first woman, Mavi (Silverio), to a weekend in the country, they are marooned in a fog on a highway. He has to get out of the car and go ahead on foot to find his turning, and then he has trouble locating the car itself again. The incident precipitates a fight between him and Mavi that almost ends their relationship right there. This fog re-appears, so to speak, when he takes the second woman, Ida (Boisson), out on the open lagoon at Venice. The lagoon is a place that seems, like the fog, both

boundless and claustrophobic at the same time. The atmosphere becomes an emblem of the human relationship it engulfs.

The intelligence that was at work twenty years ago is much in evidence in this film, too. And yet something is lacking, some compulsion in Antonioni, some spirit of necessity in the film itself. In *L'Avventura*, it's as if the woman who disappears is transformed not just into another woman, but into an entire landscape and a sequence of events. She is not missing so much as diffused through the actions of others and the countryside they inhabit. The film turns her from a presence into an animus. Precisely at the moment that *Identification* attempts to become magical like this, it fails. The parallel between the fog and the lagoon remains, painfully, a mere contrivance. The scene in the latter setting is awkward and pretentious. *Identification* lacks the excitement of discovering the medium that *L'Avventura* had. Antonioni was not just exploring the aesthetic possibilities of film, but creating new ones, taking the medium in a whole new direction. Doing so gave to his filmmaking then an exhilaration that can, it's sad to say, never be recaptured.

Antonioni came into filmmaking during the formative stages of Neo-Realism, and his early work — such as the mid-1940s documentary *Gente del Po* — was done in that tradition. But his break-through was to turn Neo-Realism toward surrealism in movies. Without sacrificing the cold objectivity of the Neo-Realists, he found ways to get at isolated consciousness, ineffable mysteries, the metaphysics of the self. That kind of achievement comes but once in a lifetime.

(The first of two parts)

COLIN L. WESTERBECK, JR.

NARRATIVES OF ILLNESS

Death's other kingdom

EDWIN J. KENNEY, JR.

IT IS NO LONGER true that disease and dying are repressed topics in contemporary American life. Since Elisabeth Kubler-Ross's *On Death and Dying* (1969), discussions of illness and death are everywhere in our culture; some provide practical advice; others, such as Lawrence Le Shan's *You Can Fight For Your Life* (1977), the Simon-

tons' *Getting Well Again* (1978) and, most recently, Norman Cousins's *Anatomy of an Illness* (1979), hold out hopes of self-cure.

The most prevalent and popular works, however, are narrative accounts of the experience of serious illness — articles, books, and films that try to render what it feels like to be grievously ill and to face the prospect of imminent death, either for oneself or for others. *Reader's Digest*, *Family Circle*, *Good Housekeeping*, and other popular magazines regularly publish short accounts of such experiences. On the shelves of bookstores and at the checkout counters of supermarkets are trade



paperbacks of such runaway best sellers as Betty Rollin's *First, You Cry* (1976), Cornelius and Kathryn Ryan's *A Private Battle* (1979), and Martha Weinman Lear's *Heartsounds* (1980). Taken together these books add up to what now amounts to a new "tradition" of writings

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about illness that began with John Gunther's *Death Be Not Proud* (1949), and includes such other works as Stewart Alsop's *Stay of Execution* (1973). Moreover, many of these books have been made into films for television, contributing to a powerful mythology of illness, as in "Brian's Song" and "Sunshine," which also generated a hit song by John Denver.

DESPITE THE extraordinary popularity of these narratives, they are generally disregarded. Literary critics are not interested in such narratives just because they are so popular; this may be "writing," they say, but this is not "Literature." A more common dismissive attitude is that these books appeal only to a base, voyeuristic pleasure in the suffering of others, the impulse that brings crowds to scenes of murders, traffic accidents, and fires. Such thinking is usually allied with the claim that these works are "morbid" or "depressing."

None of this takes us very far toward an understanding of these books, their immense popularity, or their profound effect on readers. Nor does the frequent charge that these books are "sentimental"; the implication here is that the emotions presented and evoked by these personal accounts are somehow unearned. But extreme situations provoke emotions one may not know and may not want to know one has, and there is no doubt about the authenticity of the circumstances of illness or the feelings in these accounts.

Erich Segal's fictional *Love Story* is sentimental because it indulges rather than examines feelings it does not earn, because it in fact leaves out the true ugliness, pain, and fear of illness while pretending to represent them. But in our critical suspicion of false emotion we must not become distrustful of all feeling; instead, we must try to understand. Both the popularity of these narratives of illness and the confusion of our attitudes toward them are caused by unexamined feelings about illness and the process of self-confrontation which autobiographical writing represents.

In *Illness as Metaphor* (1978), Susan Sontag argued persuasively that disease,

especially cancer, which is of unknown cause and uncertain cure and which strikes randomly at individuals, becomes a locus for all our anxieties and fears. Although Sontag objects to this, to be sick immediately invokes metaphoric and symbolic thinking. To be seriously ill is truly to enter another country; it is death's other kingdom, the world of "darkness," into which one descends and in which one confronts the repressed, negative self.

The daylight world of living becomes the hospital, a place of omnipresent fluorescent light, stainless steel, and ceramic tile; rigid schedules, rules, and diets; alien instruments and machines; painful procedures and mind-altering drugs. The ordinary dreams of the future, of infinite time, become the nightmare of the finite moment of this test, this operation, this treatment. The self that sought to be loved and respected, strong and superior, good and loving, becomes the other: inadequate, unworthy, powerless, hateful. Hopes are replaced by fears; the fears of disease-spread or recurrence, of pain and death are compounded by fears of abandonment — of unacceptability, rejection, and isolation. The isolation is claustrophobic; one feels, finally, contracted into a body whose smallest, hitherto simplest function is monstrously threatening. The mind is forced obsessively back to that body, its cycles of pain and alleviation.

But in the restricted and difficult circumstances of this other world, locked in direct confrontation with the shadow self, there still remains some room for people to make what life they can, to exercise choice, even to grow beyond the crisis by examining themselves and their ways of living and to find or create a personal meaning within the suffering. Such action fulfills what Jung described as "the sole purpose of human existence"; to be able to recount it for others is "to kindle a light in the darkness of mere being" — to create more consciousness. To see this great purpose achieved under such mean circumstances is what people seek in these books and find inspiring.

Although much contemporary fiction chooses to deny the satisfactions of

"old-fashioned" realism, the "common reader" so honored by Samuel Johnson and Virginia Woolf is still magnetically drawn to meaningful personal accounts of actual human experience. Indeed, there is a fine paradox of literary history at work here. The novel in English began by pretending to be "real," not only in the sense that it was assumed to represent what was real in experience, but also in the sense that the form of the novel itself pretended to be an actual form of personal narrative: letters, diaries, criminal and spiritual confessions. Now personal narrative, or autobiography, borrows back from the development of the novel, especially in its uses of multiple points of view, interior monologue, and time shift. But the crux remains the conjoining of what the writer and the reader acknowledge is a real experience which is being represented, however artfully, in writing. It is the reality of the human suffering represented in these narratives that evokes the emotions which are simultaneously both being recounted and dealt with in some way by the writing.

The special achievement of autobiographical writing has always been to represent an actual life both as it was lived and understood by the same person so that its meaning, or a meaning, is apprehended. As narratives these books about illness try to order as well as represent, to make some sense of the experience of human suffering and, if possible, to redeem it, to make some good come of it. This is the truly personal part of the narrative, and this is what places these books in the persistently strong tradition of spiritual, though not necessarily religious, autobiography.

In ordering and redeeming suffering, personal narrative includes elements of other literary forms; that is one of its great sources of strength. In addition to describing the ironic journey to the underworld, these books are also elegies, memoirs, and celebrations of people and ways of living that are at once achieved and imperiled, even lost, by disease and death. So they are also love stories, the love of friends, husbands and wives, parents and children.

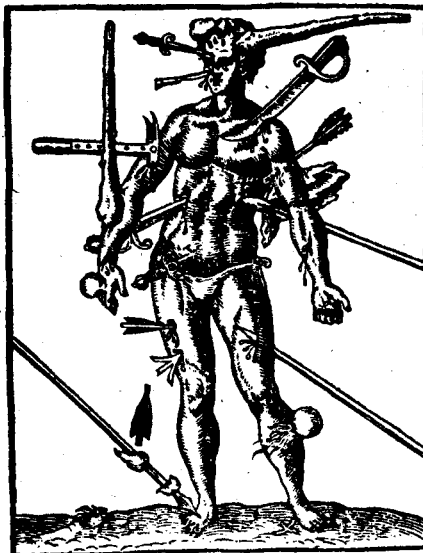
In most cases the plots take an inevitable tragic form: a "great" person in the

common sense of one filled with life and talent and promise struggles heroically against disease, an enemy, a fate, which may ultimately vanquish the person. But in the disorder, suffering, and death of the tragic conflict, living itself and the values that give life meaning are affirmed — love and work and the possibilities of community, of caring. Illness reveals to the people in these books not only what being alive in the world feels like but also what it means to them. The books these people have made extend and share their experiences and insights with us so that our sense of life and the possibilities of living can be similarly heightened. Ultimately these books are concerned with how to live, and how to bear the unbearable.

STILL THERE are differences in the way the writers of these personal narratives respond to these issues. The differences are determined partly by the personalities of the people, and partly by the nature, treatments, and courses of their disease. But the most significant differences depend on how thoroughly their lives are both lived and examined; the crucial difference turns on not only how but how well people can accept all that they have experienced.

The simplest responses are uncritical denial or acceptance of mortal illness, and they occur in the most dramatically transformed autobiographical accounts, "Brian's Song" and "Sunshine." During his first season as a starter for the for the Chicago Bears, Brian Piccolo died of embryonal cell carcinoma after seven months of radical surgery, radiation, and chemotherapy. In the painful, frenzied, and rapid rush towards death, Piccolo began telling the story of his career to Jeannie Morris, who published it, along with his medical records and an account of his death as *Brian Piccolo, A Short Season* (1971); the following year "Brian's Song" appeared as an ABC-TV Movie of the Week, and the screenplay, accompanied by stills, was issued in paperback.

Piccolo was not a reflective man, and he did not have much time for reflection; the emphasis of his narrative to Jeannie Morris falls on his early life and his ex-



periences as a football player. It makes a rather conventional sports biography. According to Morris's report he did not burden anyone, not even his wife, with his inner thoughts; he continued to kid his family, teammates, and friends about his illness, and he never acknowledged the possibility of his death.

The difference between someone's not being able to accept cancer and choosing not to accept it is crucial, but there is not sufficient evidence from Piccolo himself to determine whether he made a conscious choice. Both the book and the film about him dramatize Piccolo as the physical man who responded to the assaults on his body from the disease and its treatment with the same physical courage and open affection for his family and friends that he displayed all his life. This simple, immediate, and direct response of fighting until the end was what those who loved Brian Piccolo—like Gale Sayers—salvaged from his awful death and transformed into heroic legend.

At the other extreme stands another media event, "Sunshine." Jacquelyn Helton died, at age 20, of osteogenic sarcoma; during the last eighteen months of her life she kept a tape-recorded diary as a legacy for her daughter. These tapes were the basis of the popular television film of 1973; in turn, the screenplay and the tapes became the sources of Norma Klein's "novel," also titled *Sunshine* (1974). So again we have only versions of the original autobiographical voice.

The image presented in these versions is that of a young person who does not deny but accepts, even seeks, her own death. At first Jacquelyn neglected her sore leg and did not seek adequate medical care; when she finally did receive proper diagnosis she refused the standard treatment, the amputation of her leg before the cancer spread. Her doctors could not talk her into following the prescribed treatment. She chose radiation and chemotherapy, only to refuse them when she could not tolerate their side effects and when, really, it was too late to save or even prolong her life.

The pathos of both the film and novel is derived from a young person's desperate appreciation of the beauty and joy of her life and love of her young husband and child attained by her own confused death wish. This confusion is not examined in either the film or the novel; it is submerged by the dominant and romantic image of the dying young mother who accepts death over being "a cripple." Again it is the apparent simplicity of the response which makes the legend; the emphasis is on the action and image of the life and death, not the examination of them. But however simplistic these responses are, "Brian's Song" and "Sunshine" still exert a powerful influence on our imagination of illness and dying. They both show people's intense love of the life they had to live realized in their deaths.

STANDING BETWEEN the extremes of uncritical denial and acceptance are those books whose dominant response to the experience of illness is anger: *First, You Cry* and *Heartsounds*. This anger is not, however, directed at the disease; it is directed at the medical profession, and with good reason. This point needs to be developed further, for the generally accepted cliché is that patients always blame the doctor for their illness.

There are, of course, many fine doctors who are capable of treating their patients as people, acknowledging their right to know, to make decisions about treatment, and most of all to be treated with dignity, respect, and the sympathetic understanding they deserve. But this is, unfortunately but inevitably, not al-

ways the case. Doctors make mistakes in diagnosis, decisions about treatment, execution of medical procedures, and especially in their relationships with their patients. Moreover, they do not like to admit their errors; they will cover them up, cover for one another. If confronted by the patient or the patient's family they may attempt to make it the patient's fault and claim that the doctor is being unfairly blamed for the bad news of the disease.

But patients do not always blame doctors for the bad news of their own illness. All of these books show ill people asking themselves "Why me?" but they all respond "Why not?" The ill person soon acknowledges that no talents, possessions, work, or love can protect him from being ill or dying, and as much as possible the patient accepts his being sick and suffering while others do not.

At any rate, the patient becomes immersed in the symptoms and treatment of the disease and the effort to go on living as best he can. In the face of extreme suffering, both physical and psychological, what the patient cannot accept is shoddy treatment by doctors, nurses, and hospital staff. The disease may not be preventable, may be beyond human control, but the manner in which people in the medical profession treat a person who is ill is definitely a matter in which ordinary human expectations of justice and mercy apply. If the care is bad, if the medical people are arrogant, cold, patronizing, and dismissive, insult is literally added to injury and the patient rightfully becomes angry, not at the disease, but at the treatment.

Such experience and the subsequent feelings make coping and acceptance seem almost impossible, but even the angry books show the process of self-examination necessary for going on with living. *Heartsounds* and *First, You Cry* both show in different degrees that to allow oneself to feel, express, and even honor one's own anger are the first steps in liberating oneself from the crisis; the anger can be a sign of life, of prospective hope.

The difference between the two books is that Martha Weinman Lear's account of her husband's illness and death of heart disease was written primarily dur-

ing his treatment, so that it presents powerfully the anger of that time. Betty Rollin's account of her mastectomy is written at a greater distance from the event, so it is more controlled. Lear's book is written while she is still in the midst of the process of trying to free herself of "bitter and corrosive feelings;" her book is a loud wail of mourning and anger, of anguish. But like *First, You Cry*, it provides a helpful corrective to the notion that people should express only "good" feelings about feeling bad.

As much as Lear wants to be rid of corrosive feelings, she also wants to justify them by her careful account of the poor treatment her husband, himself a doctor, received, and to allow them into public discussion of illness. As much as she senses people turning away from her anger, and as much as she herself wishes she could turn away from it, she still feels "it would seem somehow obscene not to feel anger." The courage, honesty, and respect for her own feelings which she expresses in this book are finally an affirmation of her own way of being and the best indication that she will be able to go on and live fully the life she has yet to live. The final word of the book is, fittingly, the ancient Hebrew toast, "L'chaim—To Life."

In both *Heartsounds* and *First, You Cry*, the crises of illness and the anger caused by poor medical care lead the women to analyze themselves and their past relationships with their families as well as their present relationships with their husbands. Betty Rollin's anger at the doctors, the "best" doctors, for not diagnosing and treating the lump in her breast when it was first discovered, leads her to see that for personal reasons, associating doctors with parents, she had always been trusting, too trusting, so that now she feels betrayed and resentful as well as "damaged."

This is an accurate analysis, for not only are people, even independent, tough-minded and tough-talking people like Betty Rollin, too willing to trust their physician, but also most doctors encourage unquestioning acceptance of their opinions and treatment. The doctor, we are all told from childhood, knows best. The patient is expected to be a "good"

patient—"a good boy or girl"—and accept obediently if not gratefully whatever the doctor says or does.

This is a difficult pattern of response to break out of, but the pain Rollin suffers from her adherence to it is finally what liberates her from it. The book she writes is both the process and the product of the violent self-confrontation and analysis her illness forced on her. It expresses anger, but it also releases and contains it. Like many other people whose stories are told in these personal narratives, she finds something redemptive in her experience of illness.

People are not radically transformed by serious illness; their characters are not changed; instead, they become what they truly are. But, as Rollin's account shows, one's way of seeing and being may change considerably, and for the better. Rollin expresses her new feeling about herself and living in her conclusion; she says that her raised consciousness about death has raised her consciousness about life to the extent that there is a recurring jingle in her head:

Am I doing
what I'd want to be doing
if I were dying?

That is the source of hope and life, of change and growth, people find in these books.

BOTH *HEARTSOUNDS* and *First, You Cry* were written as forms of therapy by the authors; Lear and Rollin were trying to order their experience and feelings as they were living them so that they could understand and therefore gain some control of their lives. This is a powerful motive in all of these personal narratives of illness, but in some of these works the writer goes beyond the therapeutic process. In *Stay of Execution, A Private Battle*, and *Death Be Not Proud*, the experience of illness is so thoroughly examined and accepted that the writers attain a transcendent vision of the meaning of their lives, even of life itself.

Stewart Alsop's *A Stay of Execution, A Sort of Memoir* is different from any of the works discussed so far because it shows a mature man remembering and reflecting on a full life and the prospect of



his own death during his last years. Alsop's intention in his book is specifically to describe "the strange, unconscious indescribable process . . . of adjusting whereby one comes to terms with death." He undertakes this task in a jauntily analytical way, but he tells how the diagnosis of acute myeloblastic leukemia (it was actually smoldering or aleukemic leukemia) produced in him "a terrible sense of aloneness, of vulnerability, of nakedness, of helplessness." This condition brought him for "the first time" in his life to appreciate and enjoy the "unspoken sustenance" he derived from his wife and to feel that his life was complete, that it was qualitatively enough.

This insight allows his conclusion to be philosophic and accepting, echoing the diction, rhythm, and tone of Ecclesiastes: "A dying man needs to die, as a sleepy man needs to sleep. . . . There is a time to live but there is also a time to die." This is Alsop's characteristic response; it is not just literary. The account of his illness, the weakness, the fevers, the tests (that awful passive verb: "To be marrowed"), the roller-coaster ride of fear and hope, elation and despair, shows how achieved his final response is. And underlying it is Alsop's joy in the full life he's led, especially in his love of his wife and family, a love fully realized in his illness and in this book, which he completed one year before his death at sixty.

This sense of a person fully entering, apprehending, and accepting his life not

against but in illness and death is more powerfully conveyed in Cornelius and Kathryn Ryan's *A Private Battle*. It is formally the most complex of all these narratives because it is composed of journals and tapes that the Ryans kept separately during the last four and a half years of Ryan's life when he was dying from cancer of the prostate. During this time Ryan underwent surgery, radiation, and estrogen therapy; against steadily increasing pain and humiliating changes in his body, fear of death, and anxiety for his family, Ryan worked to write *A Bridge Too Far*, the third volume of his history of the European theater in World War II.

As he approaches the completion of *Bridge*, Ryan experiences an extraordinary moment of both feeling and insight: the intense life he has been living is what has been keeping him alive. He recognizes that in these years he has lived the most and that *Bridge* is his best book. In spite of earlier moods of depression and despair, of pain and suffering, self-pity and isolation, he concludes that this is truly and fully his life and he would not trade places with any man.

Each morning for the past two or three years when I have wakened the first words I've said are, "Thank you, God, for this fine day." It has not mattered if the weather was bad or good. What has been important is that God has seen me through the night and given me another day to work and to be with my family. I continue to thank Him. He has allowed me to do what was important.

I have received more than my share of blessings. I have been able to cram so much into my life but it has been brimful of happiness. The most rewarding moments, the best writing I think I've ever done, the love I'd had from my wife and children and the joy I've taken in their accomplishments—all have been realized in the years I've had cancer. But I will still continue to fight it.

The Ryans show that even without hope no one should give up, for there can be so much more to life than pain and suffering

and fear of death: "Each day is like a gift to enjoy and savor."

AFTER THIRTY-TWO years in print, John Gunther's *Death Be Not Proud* remains the touchstone for all these accounts of illness because of its profound, tragic power to proclaim the value and meaning of human life from within the experience of terrible suffering and loss. It is Gunther's memoir not only of his son, Johnny, who died at the age of seventeen from cancer of the brain, but also of John Gunther himself and his former wife and their relationship.

The book is a memorial to Johnny, his great intelligence and gentle disposition, and his long, courageous struggle against death, epitomized in his difficult and dignified walk up the chapel aisle to receive his diploma from Deerfield. It is written with an expressly didactic, inspirational intent: "What I am trying to tell, however fumblingly and inadequately, is the story of a gallant fight for life, against the most hopeless odds, that should convey a relevance, a message, a lesson

NEW THIS FALL: CHRISTIAN UNCERTAINTIES

by
Monica Furlong

In *Christian Uncertainties* the popular biographer of Thomas Merton describes how the ambiguities and difficulties of prayer, sex, and death reveal to her a church for real people, not for plaster saints. She has written about the fuzzy, haunting problems of divorce, homosexuality, sin, love, and the place of prayer in ways which certainly display her own views, but which also help us come to our own decisions about her subject. This book is a way for us to think again about some aspects of the Church which long acquaintance has rendered too familiar or too distant.

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perhaps, to anybody who has ever faced ill health."

Like Alsop and the Ryans, Gunther discovers and demonstrates that what is inspiring is the human ability both to accept the disease and its probable outcome and to fight it at the same time; each of the members of the family did that, and did it for one another as well as for themselves.

As in the other books, writing *Death Be Not Proud* continues the love between Johnny and his parents that is fully manifested in the experience of suffering recounted in the book. But Gunther finally sees Johnny's life and this memoir "as a mournful tribute not only to Johnny but to the power, the wealth, the unconquerable beauty of the human spirit, will and soul."

Death Be Not Proud itself achieves the

transcendence John Gunther sees in his son's life and death. The book is his answer, his created response to the inevitable and ultimate question of mortal illness: "Why was Johnny being subjected to this merciless experience?"

The power of Johnny's spirit, or the human spirit as it expressed itself in Johnny, remains alive, not only in the minds of those who knew him, but also in the minds of all who read the book. For Gunther, Johnny and the love he and his parents shared and the brain tumor and death are all part of a universal process in which the writing of the book joins and extends: "Johnny transmits permanently something of what he was, since the fabric of the universe is continuous and eternal."

With death and dying there is life and living; that sense of completion, of bal-

anced tension, of full involvement and heightened consciousness is what these books convey. People come to these books because they sanctify life. This is not false piety or sentimentality; rather it is what many healthy, prosperous, and busy people lose or forget and then mourn without knowing it.

Far from being vulgar, the best of these personal accounts of illness attain a sacred function; they show what George Eliot once called our "small shivering selves" how the unbearable may be borne, has been borne by others. They show us people under extreme duress who have fully lived the lives they had, who became fully what they were to be, and who fully realized and could express what it meant to them. And that, as Jung knew, "makes a great many things endurable—perhaps everything."

Books: ABORTION, RELIGION, & ANGER

RACHEL WEeping consists of five essays in which James Tunstead Burtchaell makes as strong and consistent a case against the pro-choice position as anyone ever has. The essays deal with women who have had abortions, with the most frequently advanced pro-choice arguments, with comparisons between pro-choice arguments and the corruption of language and intention which led to the Holocaust, with comparisons between abortion and slavery in the American South, and with the connection between abortion and infanticide. As in any collection of essays by a single author on a single theme there are repetitions, and not all of the essays are equally successful in urging their points; but all are very much worth reading. This is solid, basic work. Burtchaell's treatment of each subject is thorough, and often-disturbing in a way which transcends this already disturbing subject.

For example, in writing of the interviews conducted by Francke and Graham with women who chose to abort their children, Burtchaell comments, "The women speaking here are wary. They

RACHEL WEeping

AND OTHER ESSAYS ON ABORTION

James Tunstead Burtchaell, C.S.C.
Andrews & McMeel, \$20, 400 pp.

John Garvey

have been disappointed in their closest relationships, those of affection and kinship and commitment, which create for people the security of home. Somehow these women have not found—or forged—bonds that are firm attachments yet allow a desirable elasticity of freedom. . . . Lacking the guarantees of their own individuality [they] are weak to acknowledge it in others. Deprived of secure attachment, they seem somehow handicapped in offering it. The unborn, at cost of his or her life, seems to suffer from a failure of personal bonding that the mother also experiences with her parents and with her mate(s), and perhaps with her other children as well. As one woman, describing her own abortion decision two years into her marriage, put it: 'That child would have been so fucked up

because I was fucked up. Billy was so fucked up, our financial scene was so bad. Everything about our lives was so crazy and so unsettled and so unresolved that a child—probably would have been so resented and so not treated well that he would have gotten the shit end of the stick.'"

Burtchaell points out that the religious groups which have been most strongly opposed to abortion are those which have been most firm in stressing the importance of marriage and family. As different as they certainly are in other ways, in this Orthodox Judaism, Roman Catholicism, and Mormonism are similar. The suggestion this makes (as does the passage quoted above) is that permissive attitudes towards abortion are the reflection of a much more profound cultural division. It is a division between an explicitly secular culture which regards moral questions as absolutely subjective, and another culture (or rather a set of subcultures) which believes that morality has claims on us which outweigh the claims made by the simple pursuit of happiness, personal satisfaction, or com-

fort. Here I don't want to pursue the question of tactics—it is important to ask whether the people on either side are right to turn to the coercive mechanism of law to get their point of view across—but only to point out that the division is deep, and must be acknowledged in any discussion of the problem. It is a gulf which can't be bridged by rational argument, but only, it seems, by conversion from one point of view to another. Each side is plainly baffled by the other. Burtchaell can be witty and pointed about this. He says, for example, "I do not reckon the pro-abortion movement to be essentially anti-Catholic. Their uncivil and sometimes intemperate fusillades against bishops and dogma and thoughtless conformity do not issue, as one might be forgiven for thinking, from a studied opposition to the Catholic church. Let a comparison serve here. It is normal in Latin America for the affluent to revile efforts by Catholic clergy and activist laity on behalf of land reform and democratic government and the elimination of torture: they say this is all Communist-inspired. It is not that the affluent, whose ease comes from the subjection of most of their countrymen, know much about Catholic doctrine on justice (or Marxist doctrine on it). They simply cannot fathom why anyone could wish to favor peasants at their expense, and so they suppose that only Communism could inspire such a thing. So also, many people who are sensitive to the sacrifices that women—especially very young or very poor or very embarrassed or very unresourceful women—would have to make if they gave birth to their children, and who are used to the advantages of being able to eliminate those children at will—these people cannot fathom why anyone would wish to favor the unborn at their expense. And they suppose that only dogmatism could inspire such a thing."

Burtchaell says that he doubts whether people derive their basic convictions about this subject from their religious faith. Here I believe there is a contradiction. Like Burtchaell, I heard almost nothing about abortion growing up through the Catholic school system. I heard much more about contraception, and arrived at a position which is not yet

official. Because of the Supreme Court's decision this is not true of my children: they hear more in school about abortion than about contraception. In any case, one's position is plainly not a question of walking behind bishops in lock-step, a caricature of Catholic procedure. But there is certainly something religious in a broader sense which enters our attitude towards abortion. Burtchaell points out the opposition to abortion from groups which have strong and definite values with regard to marriage and family. He also points out that those whose religious backgrounds incline them to an acceptance of secular thought are most inclined towards an easy view of abortion (e.g., Unitarians, Jews of the Reformed tradition, and Ethical Culturists).

Supporters of the pro-life movement have been unwilling to deal with the religious underpinnings of their point of view because it seems to throw the question into the difficult church-state arena. But a failure to do this grappling means that we will be forced to argue it on scientific grounds (arguing, for example, that it can be determined when human life begins); and this is dangerous, because here we will be forced to come up with a definition—which is to say a limited and limiting statement—of what being human means. Or we will be forced to admit that since these things cannot be determined finally we must leave them open, and consign them to the realm of subjective taste. The approach to life which began to flower with the Enlightenment and which has become part of our popular understanding rejects the belief in moral absolutes (which is not the same thing as recognizing that any particular formulation of a belief is necessarily limited and inadequate), despite the absolutism about quantification and measurement, and the belief in a clear division between objectivity and subjectivity, which lie at the heart of scientism. The only perceptions which seriously challenge scientific ones are religious and philosophical. They can be argued only from grounds of agreement across a range of cultures and times which appeal to an ancient and largely forgotten or ignored sense of what it means to be human. As difficult as it may

be, the work of people who want to make a pro-life argument in any area (whether anti-abortion or anti-arms-race) will have to make appeals which are, ultimately, religious—not denominational, maybe, but certainly religious, unless religion is allowed to be reduced to a question of simple denominationalism. If religion is so reduced, of course, the worst aspects of secularism will have won, by making religion a subjective and quirky thing rather than a source of insight.

Burtchaell's own passion and insight are religious, in that they depend on an understanding of life which accepts the unknown and unknowable not as threats to be guarded against, but as connections to the source of life, and the strength from which people live. The belief that light and life can come from what looks like darkness and feels like darkness was a source of strength for the anti-slavery movement, for the anti-war movement, and is currently for the anti-nuclear movement. I understand the reluctance of the pro-life movement to acknowledge its religious sources; it gives opponents



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the opportunity to limit the question to denominational allegiance. But I hope that it is religious at its center: I would think that my Catholic background was deficient if it didn't make me think that abortion meant taking life, which ought to be infinitely valued. It is deficient insofar as it does not make people equally sensitive to other threats to human life, and the need to regard all human beings as infinitely important. The question here is not one of imposing religious values on others, but rather of insisting that religion is not by definition innocuous. At times it will—it must, as in the case of abolition and, more recently, the arms race—get in the way of political compromise and convenience.

I have one other problem with *Rachel Weeping*. Burtchaell can be caustic, and at times he overstates a good case, or allows an understandable bitterness to lead him into outrageous generalizations. For example, he accuses “feminist partisans” of leading young women to believe that the way to secure the “full stature and standing of female adulthood is the sacrificing of their own unborn young, scions also of their helpmates and partners. It is a dread and awesome initiation; strangely thus is a woman blooded and anointed and made a freewoman, at such a cost to her own kind.”

Who is this sort of writing for? If it is for people who already agree with the case Burtchaell wants to make, it does

little more than let them chortle “right on.” It certainly advances no understanding, and it will hardly warm the hearts of feminists who might otherwise agree with Burtchaell, or those who believe abortion to be tragic but necessary. I don't agree at all with the latter group, but they are not bloodthirsty Maenads. People looking for arguments against Burtchaell's otherwise solidly argued case need only turn to those passages where the flow of feeling grabs the wheel away from the more careful and insightful thinker whose clarity is the strength of this book.

Rachel Weeping is important. Few other people have addressed the subject of abortion so well—John Noonan is the only other name who comes to mind. The essays on pro-abortion arguments and on the connection between abortion and infanticide are especially powerful. If Burtchaell's anger can lead on occasion to excess, the same instinct, banked a little, can be properly devastating: Burtchaell points out the vast shift in Planned Parenthood's stand on abortion, lets the facts speak for themselves, and they are damning. He takes Joseph Fletcher's arguments apart and does it very well. I don't know that *Rachel Weeping* will convert anyone from a pro- to an anti-abortion stand, but for those who want to think clearly about the issue, or to witness clear thinking being done, it is essential.

anguish of trying to save community identity. An architect wants to buy the convent and turn the building into a studio. His offer plunges the small community of St. Aidan's into a crisis of fidelity.

This portrayal of what is perilously close to the actual experience of many contemporary women religious is not without flaws: characterization is weak (the sisters sometimes blur into one another), and symbols are too overt (here and there a pathetic fallacy). The most vivid characters are dead; and the disembodied voice of the Foundress overshadows the text like a stern and uncompromising assistant to the deity. In her pronouncements all problems have solutions. Nothing is left to mystery. The old Rule comments archaically, with ironic applicability to the new contingencies:

Each sister will have a room of her own which she will keep in perfect order at all times. The rooms will be small and will contain nothing extraneous. The walls will be bare except for a simple crucifix. . . . No comforts of any kind will be permitted, although should health or the climate require a small rug may be used.

Even if one balks at the humorlessness of Ruth, whose introspective brooding shapes the novel, this story of a community's corporate struggle to be faithful, to love, and to forgive has moments of delicate beauty and astute spiritual perception. I am not certain how many outside the contemporary convent world will want to read this novel, but it probably should be read by all of us in it. Irene Mahoney's insights are quite worth our savoring: “We hurt each other . . . we misjudge, ignore, resent, and yet we give each other life. We lead each other into mystery not because of what we are but because of what we believe.”

Belief and its consequences among those whose lives are rooted in it — and make no sense without it — is the presiding force in *An Accidental Grace*. This study of a convent-in-crisis reveals the tensions and hostility that can ravage a Christian community, but we can also see the intense and not unworthy loyalties that can occasion hostility. The

Freedom, faith, fidelity

AN ACCIDENTAL GRACE

Irene Mahoney

St. Martin's, \$14.95, 337 pp.

THE WAY TO ST. IVES

Sonia Gernes

Scribners, \$13.95, 266 pp.

Diana Culbertson

BOTH of these novels about what we tidily call the “Catholic world” address the power struggle between the voices of the past and the conscience of the present. Irene Mahoney, an Ursuline sister and college professor, admits us in

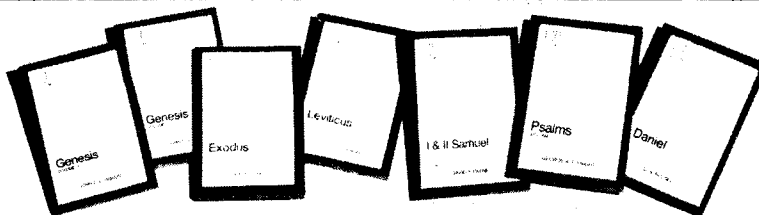
An Accidental Grace to the post-Vatican II convent world of changing values, conflicting claims to fidelity, declining membership, and diminished structural supports to faith. Ruth Arendt, having been dispensed from her vows in 1969, has returned to the small community of St. Aidan's to begin her religious life again. Remembering the thriving, spiritually confident community of the sixties, she is faced upon her return with the desolation of the eighties: the struggle to sustain the community school, the problems both of caring for the aged and retaining young members, the challenge of new apostolates, and especially, the

world of women in religious congregations still needs the wit of Eudora Welty and the brutal vigor of Flannery O'Connor to capture its peculiar intersection of sin and grace. Irene Mahoney is neither, but she is still very close to what this world feels like to the insider: how it hurts and purifies, and how it offers yet its own exemplification of the Christian community *in via*.

Another kind of Catholic community — this one a small parish in western Minnesota — is the setting of Sonia Gernes's first novel, *The Way to St. Ives*. Here we meet Rosie Deane, a forty-one-year old spinster, who confesses to impure thoughts after seeing *Dr. Zhivago* and wonders if people on their honeymoon take their clothes off. She is the victim of a cruelly protective mother, and the survivor of a parochial school education which she has internalized completely. After the death of her mother and her only brother, she must face a new existence which will bring with it the pain of a maturing conscience. But beginning her new life, she discovers that even the church seems to have abandoned her. The sisters have changed, priests are leaving; and Father McGraw and his regular penance of a decade of the rosary are no longer with her. "... Here she was in the pew with no real penance and without the tidy feeling of groceries listed and purchased and stacked away ... Father Griffin had not chided her: he had not brought up Our Lady of Fatima or the flames of hell, but somehow it didn't feel right."

For Rosie, who has identified all that was "right" with what she learned as a schoolgirl, growing up at forty-one would be a new kind of baptism: the shock of sexual discovery, disillusionment with Father Griffin and Sister Carol Ann, whose collective frailties betray her, the deception of friends, and the final confrontation with the choice between risk and psychological death. Rosie's initiation is a powerful study of the pain of entering into adult moral responsibility. Without animus, Sonia Gernes leads her Rosie out of pious dependency, and into freedom, with compassion, as well as relentless honesty.

There is wonderful texture here, from



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Rosie's childhood memories of barnyard birthing and the bloody circle out of which a bitch strains her puppy, to the final dissolution of the old world: "The path curved upward, and another sculpture came into view: a strange creature with a tiny head and two rows of spade-like fins down its back. It didn't look much taller than Rosie. " 'It's a baby,' she said, 'a baby dinosaur. . . . It had little feet and a little horned tail, and somebody killed it, and now it's dead.' She felt a wave of sorrow for the vanished baby dinosaur. . . . She leaned her head against a concrete body in Rapid City, South Dakota, and wept that the brontosaurus and the stegosaurus would be no more."

If the plot of *The Way to St. Ives* is (only very slightly) flawed, the characterization is sure, and Sonia Gernes is in complete artistic control. Her language is finely carved, especially in narrative passages, where exceptional clarity

and thematic consistency reveal steady awareness of the function of every word. One looks in vain for the superfluous gesture, the unnecessary phrase, or a landscape that does not somehow intensify our vision. When Rosie experiences her first lingual kiss amidst the purity and stillness of frozen water and snow-covered Minnesota trees, in a scene which is the geometric center of the novel, we sense meticulous crafting beneath this simple story of the loss of innocence. If Rosie's victory seems modest, we taste life in it and find ourselves rejoicing.

There is a reliable tradition that only God loves his characters more than J.D. Salinger, but in this contest of affection, Sonia Gernes offers competition to both of them. The best part about this new novel set in the shifting world of mid-century Catholicism is her awareness that Sister Mary Ignatius Hasn't Really Told It All.

most centrally, such resuscitators of the medieval heritage as the Gothic revivalist architect and eventual proto-fascist, Ralph Adams Cram.

On the whole, Lears finds these alternatives to the culture of modernity to be superficial manifestations of false consciousness. They ironically helped not to repeal modernity but instead to shore up the underpinnings of bourgeois society, and served as an escape from a confrontation with social and economic reality into an anticipation of the banality of the "therapeutic worldview" which Lears (with, perhaps, Christopher Lasch) sees as one of the chief heresies of our own time.

Lears is a thorough and provocative scholar, but his approach has its problems. The earlier portions of the book are plagued by vast quantities of social-scientific jargon and an endless repetitiveness which could have been easily avoided through judicious editing. (His treatment of Henry Adams — one of the best I have read — shows that he can combine humanistic and scientific insight gracefully.) Another problem is a tendency towards ahistoricism exhibited in his lack of attention to the intellectual forerunners of his cast of characters. Most telling, however, is his lack of clarity about his own ideological suppositions, which, when teased out, seem to point in a vaguely Christian-existentialist-socialist direction. He also tends to dismiss Liberal Protestantism as a whole as spiritually bankrupt, with little attention to its varieties and nuances even in the period with which he deals.

Where Lears's thought tends to run deep, Berman aims for breadth, and to a surprising extent achieves it. His first concern is with the literary and intellectual roots of modernism, which he traces with energy and ingenuity from Goethe's *Faust* through Marx, Baudelaire, a long string of Russian writers and their use of St. Petersburg as image (or objective correlative), through Robert Moses and Jane Jacobs. His basic concern is with the idea of modernity as two-sided, as potential liberator of human capacities or, when realized in the megalomaniac schemes of such diverse figures as Stalin or Robert Moses, destructive and dehumanizing.

Confronting modernity

ALL THAT IS SOLID MELTS INTO AIR THE EXPERIENCE OF MODERNITY

Marshall Berman

Simon and Schuster, \$17.50, 383 pp.

NO PLACE OF GRACE

ANTIMODERNISM AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF AMERICAN CULTURE, 1880-1920

T. J. Jackson Lears

Pantheon Books, \$18.50, 375 pp.

Peter W. Williams

BOTH of these works deal with intellectual and artistic responses to the rapid and violently disruptive social transformations of the past two centuries, and both do so in an unusually engaging and provocative manner. Each writer is staggeringly ambitious in defining his scope, and neither is reticent about making clear his responses to his subjects and subject-matter. Each represents interdisciplinary scholarship on a grand scale, and both writers attempt to bring the matter and methods of the humanities and social sciences to bear on one another.

Each finds inspiration in Karl Marx's characterization of the modern age as one in which "all that is solid melts into air": the epoch of intense modernization is one in which all that humanity has previously taken for granted is now subject not only to question but to immediate and dramatic challenge and possible overthrow. And, perhaps not surprisingly, the remarkably ambitious scope of each work raises some problems.

Professor Lears's theme is "anti-modernism": the rejection of the emergent world of urban anonymity and consumption-oriented capitalism in favor of any number of picturesque alternatives. His subjects were members of the "Eastern Establishment elite" of the decades near the turn of the previous century, most of them relegated now to a perhaps deserved oblivion. Among them were the advocates of the Arts and Crafts movement, which presented itself as a counterforce to mass production; Victorian militarists who rejected the effete-ness of bourgeois society in favor of virile armed conflict; dabblers in the exotic religious traditions of the Orient; and,

His central image is the modern city, the prime arena of modern life and the battleground between those who strive to preserve its diversity and vitality and others who would impose their own transformations upon it without regard to human cost.

Where Lears's prose is at times redundant, convoluted, and jargonistic to the point of obscurity, Berman is astonishingly easy to read. Though a social scientist, he eschews the technical language which Lears over-uses and engages the reader in a uniformly smooth flow of ideas over vast cultural and historical landscapes. His own commitment to the promises of modernity and his simultaneous recognition of its ambiguities remove his work from the realm of scholarship in the narrow sense and invite the broader readership which his work deserves.

Berman's very clarity, however, raises some alarms. His portrayal of Faust as the spiritual antecedent of Robert Moses is clever — but what happens to the rest of Goethe's intricacies? His use of Baudelaire to illuminate nineteenth-century reactions to the reconstruction of Paris is equally engaging, but what of *Les Fleurs du Mal*? This tendency towards oversimplification haunts the work, though it does not finally destroy Berman's immense powers of suggesting relationships among otherwise disparate aspects of modernity.

Both books, in short, bring together vast bodies of material and extract from them clever and telling analyses of the roots of the culture of modernity (and its foes.) Both writers are accomplished analysts, but their prophetic stances leave the reader hanging. Is the real answer to the devastation of the Bronx an historical mural? Does the failure of the anti-modernists lie in their inability to anticipate the dimly articulated social

criticism of Professor Lears? Both books are immensely provocative, even dazzling ventures into both cultural analysis and synthesis. However, they may leave their readers looking for solutions which have seemingly melted into air.

Correspondence

(Continued from page 610)

heads to fight the huge budget cuts in federal programs for the poor. Members of the Congress have been lobbied by the

Campaign to preserve the integrity of these basic benefit programs as a means of restoring the societal responsibility toward the poor. There is nothing sacred about food stamps, Medicaid, subsidized housing, cash assistance, or job training. But these programs are aimed at helping many of the 32 million impoverished Americans, whose dignity as human beings cannot be denied, despite the ravages of our economic system.

The archbishop's call for a special responsibility toward the poor by religious

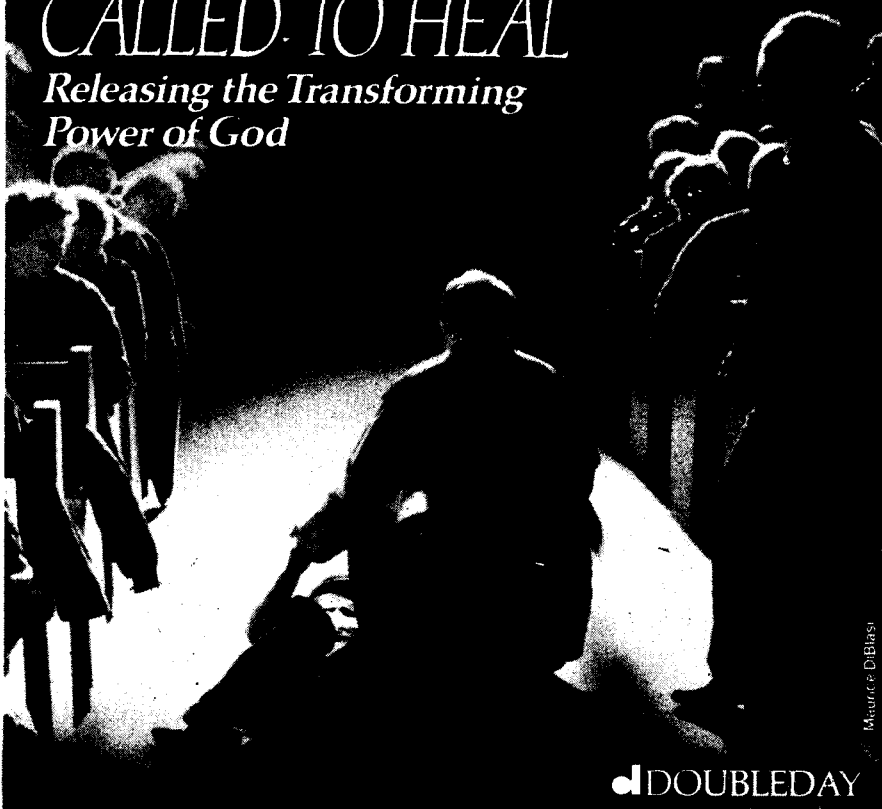
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DOUBLEDAY

JOHN GARVEY writes regularly for *Commonweal*. His books include *Saints for Confused Times* (Thomas More).

DIANA CULBERTSON, O.P., is associate professor of comparative literature and director of Catholic studies at Kent State University.

PETER W. WILLIAMS is the author of *Popular Religions in America* (Prentice-Hall).

groups is clearly one which combines charity and justice. Given that less than one-tenth, by one estimate, of the cuts can be met through private giving, it is clear that reliance on sporadic giving is not enough, that an ongoing governmental role is needed. Doing economic justice means crying out on behalf of the poor. The aim of the Emergency Campaign is not to legislate morality, but to restrain immorality; not to make bad people good, but to make vulnerable people safe.

Elected officials who continue to exhort churches to take up the slack, and feel that the poor are better off with a supply-side policy in full force are more than naive; they are promulgating an immoral sham upon the poor. Lip service to the needy is not enough. Archbishop Bernardin is correct in calling upon the churches to get involved in putting action behind words.

KEN HUGHES
Coordinator,
Interreligious Campaign
for Economic Justice

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Government & poverty

Stanford, Calif.

To the Editors: Archbishop Bernardin's article on poverty [Sept. 24] is refreshing in its acknowledgment that the church has no special political, economic, or social expertise, and in its insistence on the importance of a search for truth in public policy. Nevertheless, he appears not to recognize how much the "principles" of Catholic social teaching he cites with approval embody political and economic judgments.

If government is held to have a duty to "promote the production of a sufficient supply of material goods" and to safeguard "rights" which include "useful employment" and a "sufficient share of earthly goods," it must be assumed that it is considered both moral and necessary for governments to play an active role in the production and distribution of goods and services. The obvious implication is that reductions in the social programs of the sixties and seventies pose serious moral questions.

For such programs to be morally requisite, it must first appear that they are likely to achieve their intended objectives of helping the poor. However, there is evidence that, instead, they have helped foster a poverty "class."

Historically, in America, most families have not remained permanently poor. Even today, most of those on welfare or the unemployment rolls remain for relatively brief periods. One reason is simply that income tends to rise with age and experience. Other factors aside, one would expect that ethnic groups whose members' average age is younger would have lower per capita incomes than those groups which are older: Hispanics vs. Jews, for example. What appears to be happening, however, is that growing numbers are born, live, and die dependent on public funds, with their own human potential and that of their children irrevocably stunted.

Just published reports of the 1980 Census show that, but for an increase in single-headed households, the income of black families relative to whites' would have risen over the last decade. Statistics

further indicate that much poverty, irrespective of race, is attributable to this increase, mainly in female-headed households. Some of this is a result of a sharp rise in the divorce rate, but a substantial part reflects the explosion of pregnancies among unwed teenagers of all races. Obviously, the expansion in AFDC and its decreasing stigma is not solely responsible, but during the Depression when welfare was both less available and less acceptable, the birth rate among the unwed of all races and classes was but a fraction of what it is today.

The real evil of programs such as AFDC is that they spawn generations of families with no productive skills, the so-called "underclass." Children of such families form a large share of the caseloads of social service agencies dealing with neglected and abused children. Too often, their emotional and physical scars are permanent.

There is a salient distinction between public and private welfare programs: the latter are less likely to create and maintain dependency. The more limited funds in the private sector make it less able to generate the social service bureaucracies which, because they are maintained by the programs they administer, have a stake in their continuance.

In a related area, liberals have long asserted that minimum wage legislation is needed to assure a "just wage." Studies by economist Walter Williams and others show that each substantial increase in the level and coverage of the minimum wage has been associated with a rise in unemployment among those at the bottom of the economic ladder. Today, the unemployment rate for minority youth hovers at the 40-50 percent level in some areas, although in earlier decades (when discrimination was more prevalent) it was at times less than for white youths.

As U.S. government transfer programs, including but not limited to those for the poor, expanded in recent decades, inflation rose and productivity declined. When productivity declines, so do opportunities for useful employment, as exemplified most recently by layoffs in the automobile industry. The fact that this pattern has appeared in such dispa-

rate countries as Britain, Sweden, and now, apparently, West Germany, suggests a causal relationship. Furthermore, underdeveloped countries whose governments have imposed extensive economic controls, such as Tanzania, have experienced declines in real wealth and productivity.

Evidence that government intervention may exacerbate poverty is usually ignored by liberals, including Catholics. Thus, clerics, who clearly lack any knowledge of economics, are quick to condemn cutbacks in welfare programs and to blame greed and selfishness for unemployment and poverty. In a similar posture are the Latin American bishops whose concern for the poor is commendable, but whose ignorance of both democracy and economics leads them to espouse the socialism which has crippled too many economies. They should, but probably will not, study the development economist Peter Bauer.

It is to be hoped that being a "church of the poor" will not be equated with support of the welfare state and/or socialism. Unfortunately, this interpretation seems all too prevalent.

MARY ASH

For more on this, see page 612.

THE EDITORS

Techno-theology

Belmont, Calif.

To the Editors: Father Sebastian Moore is to be congratulated for his insightful article "Bishops' Dilemma", [Sept. 24] . . . I would suggest that the nuclear weapons dilemma, like those in medical ethics and genetic engineering, has been posed by advances in technology. That same force may resolve those dilemmas (or at least transcend them by redefining moral issues, or posing new dilemmas).

First, consider the increased accuracy of nuclear and other forms of weaponry. The best way to deter Soviet leaders from launching a nuclear attack against us is to convince them that *they themselves* will be the target of the retaliation. Unfortunately, in order to kill them, at present we would have to kill several million innocent Soviet citizens.

Second, consider the increased defen-

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sive capability against a nuclear attack. A system of high energy beam weapons mounted on satellites could, theoretically, de-activate enemy missiles and bombers. Research and development could make this a reality.

Technology marches on. Some breakthroughs may be decidedly destabilizing, while others may tend to reduce the likelihood of nuclear war. The same thing can be said about negotiated reductions of armaments. Perhaps it is not possible for moral theologians to come out with a single pro- or con- position on deterrence or the freeze. The situation is too dependent upon the contingencies of technology and political strategy. . . .

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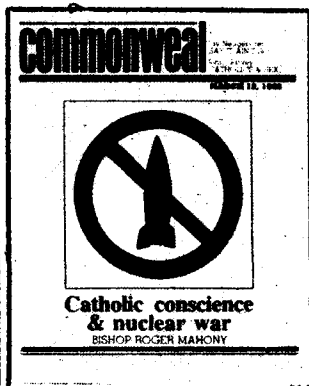
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